

Hayden, 11-



A BOOK TOKEN



AN IDEAL HUSBAND

AN IDEAL HUSBAND

BY

OSCAR WILDE

A NEW ACTING VERSION PRODUCED BY
SIR GEORGE ALEXANDER AT THE
ST. JAMES'S THEATRE

METHUEN & CO. LTD.
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LONDON

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PREFACE

AN IDEAL HUSBAND was first produced at the Haymarket Theatre under the management of Mr. Lewis Waller and Mr. H. H. Morell on January 3, 1895. Conceived in the conventions of the older drama, there are certain features in the play which preclude its being performed in its entirety. The asides and soliloquies have therefore been suppressed as far as possible. Some of the allusions in the dialogue, having little significance for the present generation, have been omitted or adapted. The fourth act has been slightly reconstructed and simplified. For all these alterations and omissions I am entirely responsible, though in making them I have received the indispensable approval of Sir George Alexander and the invaluable assistance of Mr. Vivian Reynolds, both of whom are of Lord Goring's opinion that the only thing to do with good advice is to pass it on.

Mindful of the fate of Uzzah, I have been very scrupulous about any adaptations, if I have been a little reckless about the "cuts."

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In the case of the former, a comparison with the original published text will prove how very few I have thought it necessary to make ; while in regard to the latter it must be remembered that the play has never been performed from that text. No acting version has hitherto been printed.

In two very different plays, *Salomé* and *The Importance of Being Earnest*, Wilde had almost unconsciously adopted the "new technique." I remember Wilde himself expressing his regret that some of the dialogue was already a trifle old-fashioned when he was correcting the proofs of *An Ideal Husband* for publication in 1899, four years after its production. Indeed, he contemplated re-writing the play, but I foresaw that his health would not have permitted him to carry out this intention. The publisher, moreover, was becoming impatient for copy, and Wilde's constant additions and alterations in the proofs were a source of acrimonious correspondence.

Three hundred years hence a future Victorian Stage Society will no doubt produce *An Ideal Husband* from its original published text, and I shall be gibbeted with Nicholas Rowe and Colley Cibber by the archæological enthusiasts. Meanwhile, I salute the present gallows.

ROBERT ROSS

April 5, 1914.

THE PERSONS OF THE PLAY

IN THE ORDER OF THEIR APPEARANCE

MRS. MARCHMONT;

THE COUNTESS OF BASILDON

MASON *Butler to Sir Robert
Chiltern*

THE EARL OF CAVERSHAM, K.G.

LADY CHILTERN

MISS MABEL CHILTERN . . . *Sir Robert Chiltern's
Sister*

LADY MARKBY

MRS. CHEVELEY

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN, BART. *Under-Secretary for
Foreign Affairs*

VISCOUNT GORING *Son of the Earl of
Caversham, K.G.*

VICOMTE DE NANJAC . . . *Attaché at the French
Embassy in London*

MR. MONTFORD *One of Sir Robert
Chiltern's Secretaries*

PHIPPS *Lord Goring's Servant*

HAROLD }
JAMES } *Footmen*

THE SCENES OF THE PLAY

ACT I

THE OCTAGON ROOM IN SIR ROBERT CHILTERN'S
HOUSE IN GROSVENOR SQUARE

ACT II

MORNING-ROOM IN SIR ROBERT CHILTERN'S HOUSE

ACT III

A SITTING-ROOM IN LORD GORING'S HOUSE IN
CURZON STREET

ACT IV

SAME AS ACT II

TIME : THE PRESENT

PLACE : LONDON

The action of the play is completed between a Wednesday evening and the following Friday morning.

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ACT I

Octagon-room at SIR ROBERT CHILTERN'S house in Grosvenor Square, brilliantly lighted and full of guests. At the top of the staircase stands LADY CHILTERN, a woman of grave Greek beauty, about twenty-seven years of age. She receives the guests as they come up. Over the well of the staircase hangs a great chandelier with wax lights, which illumine a large eighteenth-century French tapestry stretched on the staircase wall. On the right is the entrance to the music-room. The sound of a string quartette is faintly heard. The entrance on the left leads to other reception-rooms. MRS. MARCHMONT and LADY BASILDON, two very pretty women, are seated together on a sofa. They are types of exquisite fragility. Their affectation of manner has a delicate charm.

MRS. MARCHMONT. Going on to the Hartlocks' to-night, Margaret?

LADY BASILDON. I suppose so. Are you?

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MRS. M. Yes. Horribly tiresome parties they give, don't they?

LADY B. Never know why I go. Never know why I go anywhere.

MRS. M. I come here to be emancipated.

LADY B. Ah! I hate that.

MRS. M. So do I. But dear Gertrude Chiltern is always telling me that I should have some serious purpose in life. So I come here to try to find one.

LADY B. (*Looking round through her lorgnette.*) I don't see anybody here to-night whom one could possibly call a serious purpose. The man who took me in to dinner talked to me about his wife the whole time. What did your man talk about?

MRS. M. About myself.

LADY B. (*Languidly.*) And were you interested?

MRS. M. (*Shaking her head.*) Not in the smallest degree.

LADY B. What martyrs we are, dear Margaret!

MRS. M. (*Rising.*) And how well it becomes us, Olivia!

(*THEY rise and go towards the music-room. The VICOMTE DE NANJAC, a young attaché known for his neckties and his Anglomania, approaches with a low bow, and enters into conversation.*)

MASON. (*Announcing guests from the top of the staircase.*) Mr. and Lady Jane Barford.
Lord Caversham.

(*Enter LORD CAVERSHAM, an old gentleman of seventy, wearing the riband and star of the Garter. A fine Whig type. Rather like a portrait by Lawrence.*)

LORD C. Good evening, Lady Chiltern! Has my good-for-nothing young son been here?

LADY CHILTERN. (*Smiling.*) I don't think Lord Goring has arrived yet.

(*MABEL CHILTERN coming up to LORD CAVERSHAM. MABEL CHILTERN is a perfect example of the English type of prettiness, the apple-blossom type.*)

MABEL. Why do you call Lord Goring good-for-nothing?

LORD C. Because he leads such an idle life.

MABEL. How can you say such a thing? Why, he rides in the Row each morning, goes to the Opera three times a week, and dines out every night of the season. You don't call that leading an idle life, do you?

LORD C. (*Looking at her with a kindly twinkle in his eyes.*) You are a very charming young lady!

MABEL. How sweet of you to say that, Lord Caversham! Do come to us more often. You know we are always at home on Wednesdays.

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LORD C. Never go anywhere now. Sick of London Society.

MABEL. Oh, I love London Society ! I think it has immensely improved. It is entirely composed now of beautiful idiots and brilliant lunatics.

LORD C. Hum ! Which is Goring ? Beautiful idiot, or the other thing.

MABEL. (*Gravely.*) I have been obliged for the present to put Lord Goring into a class quite by himself. But he is developing !

LORD C. Into what ?

MABEL. (*With a little curtsey.*) I hope to let you know very soon.

MASON. (*Announcing guests.*) Lady Markby. Mrs. Cheveley.

(*Enter LADY MARKBY and MRS. CHEVELEY.*

LADY MARKBY is a pleasant, kindly, popular woman, with grey hair à la marquise and good lace. MRS. CHEVELEY, who accompanies her, is tall and rather slight. Lips very thin and highly-coloured, a line of scarlet on a pallid face. Venetian red hair, aquiline nose, and long throat. Rouge accentuates the natural paleness of her complexion. Grey-green eyes that move restlessly. She is in striking colours, with diamonds. She looks rather like an orchid, and makes great demands on one's curiosity.

In all her movements she is extremely graceful. A work of art, on the whole, but showing the influence of too many schools.)

LADY MARKBY. Good evening, dear Gertrude !
So kind of you to let me bring my friend,
Mrs. Cheveley. Two such charming women
should know each other !

LADY CHILTERN. (*Advances towards MRS.
CHEVELEY with a sweet smile. Then suddenly
stops and bows rather distantly.*) I think
Mrs. Cheveley and I have met before. I
did not know she had married a second
time.

LADY M. (*Genially.*) Ah, now people marry
as often as they can, don't they ?

MRS. CHEVELEY. (*Playing with her fan.*)
But have we really met before, Lady
Chiltern ? I can't remember where. I
have been out of England for so long.

LADY C. We were at school together, Mrs.
Cheveley.

MRS. C. (*Superciliously.*) Indeed ? I have
forgotten all about my schooldays. I have
a vague impression that they were detestable.

LADY C. (*Coldly.*) I am not surprised !

MRS. C. (*In her sweetest manner.*) Do you
know, I am quite looking forward to meeting
your clever husband, Lady Chiltern. Since
he has been at the Foreign Office, he has

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been so much talked of in Vienna. They actually succeed in spelling his name right in the newspapers. That in itself is fame, on the continent.

LADY C. I hardly think there will be much in common between you and my husband.
(*Moves away.*)

(SIR ROBERT CHILTERN *enters.* *A man of forty, but looking somewhat younger. Clean-shaven, with finely-cut features, dark-haired and dark-eyed. A personality of mark. Not popular—few personalities are. But intensely admired by the few, and deeply respected by the many. The note of his manner is that of perfect distinction, with a slight touch of pride. One feels that he is conscious of the success he has made in life. A nervous temperament, with a tired look. The firmly-chiselled mouth and chin contrast strikingly with the romantic expression in the deep-set eyes. The variance is suggestive of an almost complete separation of passion and intellect, as though thought and emotion were each isolated in its own sphere through some violence of will-power. There is nervousness in the nostrils, and in the pale, thin, pointed hands. Vandyck would have liked to have painted his head.*)

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. Good evening, Lady

Markby! I hope you have brought Sir John with you?

LADY M. Oh! I have brought a much more charming person than Sir John. Sir John's temper since he has taken seriously to politics has become quite unbearable. Really, now that the House of Commons has become useful, it does a great deal of harm.

SIR R. I hope not. At any rate we do our best to amuse the public, don't we? But who is this charming person you have been kind enough to bring to us?

LADY M. Her name is Mrs. Cheveley! She has just arrived from Vienna.

SIR R. Ah! yes. I think I know whom you mean.

LADY M. Oh! she goes everywhere there, and has such pleasant scandals about all her friends.

SIR R. Do point out Mrs. Cheveley to me. I should like to see her.

LADY M. Let me introduce you (*to* MRS. CHEVELEY). My dear, Sir Robert Chiltern is dying to know you!

SIR R. (*Bowing.*) Everyone is dying to know the brilliant Mrs. Cheveley. Our attachés at Vienna write to us about nothing else.

MRS. C. Thank you, Sir Robert. An acquaintance that begins with a compliment is sure to develop into a real friendship. It

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starts in the right manner. And I find that I know Lady Chiltern already.

SIR R. Really?

MRS. C. Yes. She has just reminded me that we were at school together. I remember it perfectly now. She always got the good conduct prize.

SIR R. (*Smiling.*) And what prizes did you get?

MRS. C. My prizes came a little later on in life. I don't think any of them were for good conduct. I forget!

SIR R. I am sure they were for something charming!

MRS. C. I don't know that women are always rewarded for being charming. I think they are usually punished for it!

SIR R. Won't you sit down? And now tell me, what makes you leave your brilliant Vienna for our gloomy London—or perhaps the question is indiscreet?

MRS. C. Questions are never indiscreet. Answers sometimes are.

SIR R. Well, at any rate, may I know if it is politics or pleasure?

MRS. C. Politics are my only pleasure. We poor women who are under thirty, or say we are, have nothing open to us but politics or philanthropy. I prefer politics. I think they are more . . . becoming!

SIR R. A political life is a noble career !

MRS. C. Sometimes. And sometimes it is a clever game. And sometimes it is a great nuisance.

SIR R. Which do you find it ?

MRS. C. I ? A combination of all three.
(*Drops her fan.*)

SIR R. (*Picks it up.*) Allow me !

MRS. C. Thanks.

SIR R. But you have not told me yet what makes you honour London so suddenly. Our season is almost over.

MRS. C. Oh ! I don't care about the London season ! It is too matrimonial. People are either hunting for husbands, or hiding from them. I wanted to meet you. It is quite true. I wanted immensely to meet you, and . . . to ask you to do something for me.

SIR R. I hope it is not a little thing. I find that little things are so very difficult to do.

MRS. C. (*After a moment's reflection.*) No, I don't think it is quite a little thing.

SIR R. Do tell me what it is.

MRS. C. Later on. (*Rises.*) And now may I walk through your beautiful house ? I hear your pictures are charming. Poor Baron Arnheim—you remember the Baron ?—used to tell me you had some wonderful Gainsboroughs.

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SIR R. (*With an almost imperceptible start.*)

Did you know Baron Arnheim well?

MRS. C. (*Smiling.*) Intimately. Did you?

SIR R. At one time.

MRS. C. Wonderful man, wasn't he?

SIR R. (*After a pause.*) He was very remarkable, in many ways.

MRS. C. I often think it such a pity he never wrote his memoirs. They would have been most interesting.

MASON. Lord Goring.

(*Enter LORD GORING. Thirty-six, but always says he is younger. A well-bred, expressionless face. He is clever, but would not like to be thought so. A flawless dandy. He plays with life, and is on perfectly good terms with the world. He is fond of being misunderstood. It gives him a post of vantage.*)

SIR R. Good evening, my dear Arthur! Mrs. Cheveley, allow me to introduce to you Lord Goring, the idlest man in London.

MRS. C. I have met Lord Goring before.

LORD GORING. (*Bowing.*) I did not think you would remember me.

MRS. C. My memory is under admirable control. And are you still a bachelor?

LORD G. I . . . believe so.

MRS. C. How very romantic!

LORD G. Oh! I am not at all romantic. I am not old enough. I leave romance to my seniors.

SIR R. Lord Goring is the result of the Bachelors Club.

MRS. C. He reflects every credit on the institution.

LORD G. May I ask are you staying in London long?

MRS. C. That depends partly on the weather and partly on Sir Robert.

SIR R. You are not going to plunge us into a European war, I hope?

MRS. C. I hope not—it wouldn't suit me.

(She nods to LORD GORING, with a look of amusement in her eyes, and goes out with SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. LORD GORING saunters over to MABEL CHILTERN.)

MABEL. You are very late!

LORD G. Have you missed me?

MABEL. Awfully!

LORD G. Then I am sorry I did not stay away longer. I like being missed.

MABEL. How very selfish of you!

LORD G. I am very selfish.

MABEL. You are always telling me of your bad qualities.

LORD G. I have only told you half of them as yet.

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MABEL. Well, I delight in your bad qualities.

I wouldn't have you part with one of them.

LORD G. How very nice of you! But then you are always nice. By the way, I want to ask you a question. Who brought Mrs. Cheveley here? That woman in heliotrope, who has just gone out of the room with your brother?

MABEL. Oh, I think Lady Markby brought her. Why do you ask?

LORD G. I haven't seen her for years, that is all.

MABEL. What sort of a woman is she?

LORD G. Oh, a genius in the daytime and a problem at night!

VICOMTE DE NANJAC. (*To MABEL CHILTERN.*) May I have the pleasure of escorting you to the music-room, Mademoiselle?

MABEL. (*Looking very disappointed.*) Delighted, Vicomte, quite delighted! (*Turning to LORD GORING.*) Aren't you coming to the music-room?

LORD G. Not if there is any music going on.

MABEL. (*Severely.*) The music is in Russian. You would not understand it.

(*Goes out with the VICOMTE DE NANJAC.*)

LORD CAVERSHAM *comes up to his son.*)

LORD CAVERSHAM. Well, sir! what are you doing here? Wasting your life as usual! You should be in bed, sir. You keep too

late hours ! I heard of you the other night at Lady Rufford's dancing till four o'clock in the morning !

LORD G. Only a quarter to four, father.

LORD C. Can't make out how you stand London Society. The thing has gone to the dogs, a lot of damned nobodies talking about nothing.

LORD G. Good evening, Lady Basildon !

LADY B. (*Arching two pretty eyebrows.*) Are you here ? I had no idea you ever came to political parties !

LORD G. I adore political parties. They are the only place left to us where people dare not talk politics.

LADY B. I delight in talking politics. I talk them all day long. But I can't bear listening to them. I don't know how the unfortunate men in the House stand these long debates.

LORD G. By never listening. (*In his most serious manner.*) If one listens one may be convinced.

LADY B. Ah ! that accounts for so much in men that I have never understood, and so much in women that their husbands never appreciate in them !

MRS. M. (*With a sigh.*) Our husbands never appreciate anything in us. We have to go to others for that !

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LADY B. (*Emphatically.*) Yes, always to others, have we not?

MRS. M. (*Pressing LADY BASILDON'S hand.*) My poor Olivia! We have married perfect husbands, and we are well punished for it.

LORD G. I should have thought it was the husbands who were punished.

MRS. M. (*Drawing herself up.*) Oh, dear no! . They are as happy as possible! I am afraid Lord Goring is in the camp of the enemy as usual. I saw him talking to that Mrs. Cheveley when he came in.

LORD G. Handsome woman, Mrs. Cheveley!

LADY B. (*Stiffly.*) Please don't praise other women in our presence. You might wait for us to do that!

LORD G. I did wait.

MRS. M. Well, we are not going to praise Mrs. Cheveley.

(*Enter MABEL CHILTERN. She joins the group.*)

MABEL. Why are you talking about Mrs. Cheveley? Everybody is talking about Mrs. Cheveley! Lord Goring says—what did you say, Lord Goring, about Mrs. Cheveley? Oh! I remember, that she was a genius in the daytime and a problem at night.

MRS. M. (*In her most dreamy manner.*) I like looking at geniuses, and listening to problems.

LORD G. Ah! that is morbid of you, Mrs. Marchmont!

LADY B. (*Turning to her.*) I have always said, dear Margaret, that you were the most morbid person in London.

MRS. M. Ah! but you are always sympathetic, Olivia.

MABEL. Is it morbid to have a desire for food? I have a great desire for food. Lord Goring, will you give me some supper?

LORD G. With pleasure. (*Moves away with her.*)

MABEL. How horrid you have been! You have never talked to me the whole evening!

LORD G. How could I? You went away with the child-diplomatist.

(*They go downstairs.*)

MRS. M. Olivia, I have a curious feeling of absolute faintness. I think I should like some supper very much. I know I should like some supper.

LADY B. I am positively dying for supper, Margaret!

MRS. M. Men are so horribly selfish, they never think of these things.

LADY B. Men are grossly material, grossly material!

(*The VICOMTE DE NANJAC enters from the music-room with some other guests. After having carefully examined all the*

people present he approaches LADY BASILDON.)

VICOMTE. May I have the honour of taking you down to supper, Comtesse?

LADY B. (*Coldly.*) I never take supper, thank you, Vicomte. (*The VICOMTE is about to retire. LADY BASILDON seeing this, rises at once and takes his arm.*) But I will come down with you with pleasure.

VICOMTE. I am so fond of eating! I am very English in all my tastes.

LADY B. You look quite English, Vicomte, quite English.

(*They pass out.*)

(MR. MONTFORD, a perfectly groomed young dandy, approaches MRS. MARCHMONT.)

MR. M. Like some supper, Mrs. Marchmont?

MRS. M. (*Languidly.*) Thank you, Mr. Montford, I never touch supper. (*Rises hastily and takes his arm.*) But I will sit beside you and watch you.

MR. M. I don't know that I like being watched when I am eating!

MRS. M. Then I will watch someone else.

MR. M. I don't know that I should like that either.

(*They go downstairs with the other guests, passing SIR ROBERT CHILTERN and MRS. CHEVELEY, who now enter.*)

SIR R. And are you going to any of our country houses before you leave England?

MRS. C. Oh, no! I can't stand your English house-parties. In England people actually try to be brilliant at breakfast. That is so dreadful of them! And now you have to play bridge with the family skeleton who has given up reading the family prayers. My stay in England really depends on you.
(*Sits down on the sofa.*)

SIR R. (*Taking a seat beside her.*) Seriously?

MRS. C. Quite seriously. I want to talk to you about a great political and financial scheme, about this Sahara Irrigation Scheme.

SIR R. What a tiresome practical subject for you to talk about, Mrs. Cheveley!

MRS. C. Oh, I like tiresome practical subjects. Besides, you are interested, I know, in International schemes. You were Lord Radley's secretary, weren't you, when the Government bought the Nile Dam shares?

SIR R. Yes. But the Nile Dam was a very great and splendid undertaking. It had imperial value. It was necessary that we should have control. This scheme is a commonplace Stock Exchange swindle.

MRS. C. A speculation. A brilliant, daring speculation.

SIR R. Believe me, it is a swindle. Let us call things by their proper names. It makes

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matters simpler. We have all the information about it at the Foreign Office. In fact, I sent out a special Commission to inquire into the matter privately, and they report that the works are hardly begun, and as for the money already subscribed, no one seems to know what has become of it. I hope you have not invested in it. I am sure you are far too clever to have done that.

MRS. C. I have invested very largely in it.

SIR R. Who could have advised you to do such a foolish thing?

MRS. C. Your old friend—and mine.

SIR R. Who?

MRS. C. Baron Arnheim.

SIR R. (*Frowning.*) Ah, yes! I remember hearing, at the time of his death, that he had been mixed up in the whole affair.

MRS. C. It was his last romance. His last but one, to do him justice.

SIR R. (*Rising.*) But you have not seen my Whistler pictures yet. They are in the music-room. May I show them to you?

MRS. C. (*Shaking her head.*) I am not in a mood to-night for silver twilights. I want to talk business. (*Motions to him with her fan to sit down again beside her.*)

SIR R. I fear I have no advice to give you, except to interest yourself in something less dangerous. The success of the Sahara

scheme depends, of course, on the attitude of England, and I am going to lay the report of the Commissioners before the House to-morrow night.

MRS. C. That you must not do. In your own interests, to say nothing of mine, you must not do that.

SIR R. (*Looking at her in wonder.*) In my own interests? My dear Mrs. Cheveley, what do you mean? (*Sits down beside her.*)

MRS. C. I will be quite frank with you. I want you to withdraw the report that you had intended to lay before the House, on the ground that you have reasons to believe that the Commissioners have been prejudiced or misinformed, or something. Then I want you to say a few words to the effect that the Government is going to reconsider the question, and that you have reason to believe that the scheme, if completed, will be of great international value. You know the sort of things ministers say in cases of this kind. A few ordinary platitudes will do. Will you do that for me?

SIR R. You cannot be serious in making me such a proposition!

MRS. C. I am quite serious.

SIR R. (*Coldly.*) I hope not.

MRS. C. (*Speaking with great deliberation and emphasis.*) Ah! but I am. And if you do

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what I ask you, I . . . will pay you very handsomely !

SIR R. Pay me !

MRS. C. Yes.

SIR R. I am afraid I don't quite understand what you mean.

MRS. C. (*Leaning back on the sofa and looking at him.*) How very disappointing ! And I have come all the way from Vienna in order that you should thoroughly understand me.

SIR R. I fear I don't.

MRS. C. (*In her most nonchalant manner.*) My dear Sir Robert, you are a man of the world, and you have your price, I suppose. Everybody has. The drawback is that most people are so dreadfully expensive. I know I am. I hope you will be more reasonable in your terms.

SIR R. (*Rises indignantly.*) You have lived so long abroad, Mrs. Cheveley, that you seem to be unable to realise that you are talking to a member of the English Government.

MRS. C. (*Detains him by touching his arm with her fan, and keeping it there while she is talking.*) I realise that I am talking to a man who laid the foundation of his fortune by selling to a Stock Exchange speculator a Cabinet secret. (*Rising and facing him.*) That I know the real origin of your wealth

and your career, and I have got your letter, too.

SIR R. What letter?

MRS. C. (*Contemptuously.*) The letter you wrote to Baron Arnheim, when you were Lord Radley's secretary, telling the Baron to buy Nile Dam shares—a letter written three days before the Government announced its own purchase.

SIR R. (*Hoarsely.*) It is not true.

MRS. C. You thought that letter had been destroyed. How foolish of you! It is in my possession.

SIR R. The affair to which you allude was no more than a speculation. The House of Commons had not yet passed the bill; it might have been rejected.

MRS. C. It was a swindle. Let us call things by their proper names. It makes everything simpler. And now I am going to sell you that letter, and the price I ask for it is your public support of the Sahara scheme. You made your own fortune out of one piece of engineering. You must help me and my friends to make our fortunes out of another!

SIR R. It is infamous, what you propose—infamous!

MRS. C. Oh, no! This is the game of life as we all have to play it, sooner or later!

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SIR R. I cannot do what you ask me.

MRS. C. You mean you cannot help doing it.

You know you are standing on the edge of a precipice. And it is not for you to make terms. It is for you to accept them. If you refuse you are ruined, that is all! Remember to what a point your Puritanism in England has brought you. In old days nobody pretended to be a bit better than his neighbours. With our present mania for morality, every one has to pose as a paragon of incorruptibility, and what is the result? You all go over like nine-pins—one after the other. If it were known that as a young man, secretary to a great and important minister, you sold a Cabinet secret for a large sum of money, and that that was the origin of your wealth and career, you would be hounded out of public life, you would disappear completely. Of course I am not talking morality to you. You must admit in fairness that I have spared you that. Years ago you did a clever, unscrupulous thing; it turned out a great success. And now you have got to pay for it. Before I leave you to-night you have got to promise me to suppress your report, and speak in the House in favour of this scheme.

SIR R. What you ask is impossible.

MRS. C. You must make it possible. You

know what your English newspapers are like. Suppose that when I leave this house I drive down to some newspaper office, and give them this scandal and the proofs of it! Think of their loathsome joy, of the delight they would have in dragging you down, of the mud and mire they would plunge you in. Think of the hypocrite with his greasy smile, penning his leading article, and arranging the foulness of the public placard.

SIR R. You want me to withdraw the report, and to make a short speech stating that I believe there are possibilities in the scheme?

MRS. C. (*Sitting down on the sofa.*) Those are my terms.

SIR R. (*In a low voice.*) I will give you any sum of money you want.

MRS. C. Even you are not rich enough to buy back your past. No man is.

SIR R. I will not do what you ask me. I will not.

MRS. C. You have to. If you don't. . . .
(*Rises from the sofa.*)

SIR R. (*Bewildered and unnerved.*) Wait a moment! What did you propose? You said that you would give me back my letter, didn't you?

MRS. C. Yes. That is agreed. I will be in the Ladies' Gallery to-morrow. If by then you have made an announcement to the

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House in the terms I wish, I shall hand you back your letter with the prettiest thanks, and the best, or at any rate the most suitable, compliment I can think of. I intend to play quite fairly with you. One should always play fairly . . . when one has the winning cards. The Baron taught me that . . . amongst other things.

SIR R. You must let me have time to consider your proposal.

MRS. C. No ; you must settle now !

SIR R. Give me a week—three days !

MRS. C. Impossible ! I have got to telegraph to Vienna to-night.

SIR R. My God ! what brought you into my life ?

MRS. C. Circumstances. (*Moves towards the door.*)

SIR R. Don't go. I consent. The report shall be withdrawn.

MRS. C. Thank you. I knew we should come to an amicable agreement. I understood your nature from the first. I analysed you. And now you can get my car for me. I see the people coming up from supper, and Englishmen always get amorous after a meal, and that bores me dreadfully.

(*Exit SIR ROBERT CHILTERN.*)

(*Enter Guests, LADY MARKBY, LORD CAVERSHAM, LADY BASILDON, MRS. MARCHMONT, MABEL CHILTERN, MR. MONTFORD, ETC.*)

LADY M. Well, dear Mrs. Cheveley, I hope you have enjoyed yourself. Sir Robert is very entertaining, is he not?

MRS. C. Most entertaining! I have enjoyed my talk with him immensely.

LADY M. He has had a very interesting and brilliant career. And he has married a most admirable wife. Lady Chiltern is a woman of the very highest principles, I am glad to say. I am a little too old now, myself, to trouble about setting a good example, but I always admire people who do. And Lady Chiltern has a very ennobling effect on life, though her dinner-parties are rather dull sometimes. But one can't have everything, can one? And now I must go, dear. Shall I call for you to-morrow?

MRS. C. Thanks.

LADY M. We might drive down to Ranelagh for tea. Everything looks so fresh there.

MRS. C. Except the people!

LADY M. Perhaps the people are a little jaded. I have often observed that the Season as it goes on produces a kind of softening of the brain. Good-night, dear! (*To LADY CHILTERN, who enters.*) Good-night, Gertrude!

(*Goes out on LORD CAVERSHAM'S arm.*)

MRS. C. What a charming house you have,

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Lady Chiltern! I have spent a delightful evening. It has been so interesting getting to know your husband.

LADY C. Why did you wish to meet my husband?

MRS. C. Oh, I will tell you. I wanted to interest him in this Sahara Irrigation scheme, of which I dare say you have heard. And I found him most susceptible—susceptible to reason, I mean. A rare thing in a man. I converted him in ten minutes. He is going to make a speech in the House to-morrow in favour of the idea. It will be a great occasion!

LADY C. There must be some mistake. That scheme could never have my husband's support.

MRS. C. Oh, I assure you it's all settled. I don't regret my tedious journey from Vienna now. It has been a great success. But, of course, for the next twenty-four hours the whole thing is a dead secret.

LADY C. (*Gently.*) A secret? Between whom?

MRS. C. (*With a flash of amusement in her eyes.*) Between your husband and myself.

SIR R. (*Entering.*) Your car is here, Mrs. Cheveley!

MRS. C. Thanks! Good evening, Lady Chiltern! Good-night, Lord Goring! I am at

Claridge's. Don't you think you might leave a card?

LORD G. If you wish it, Mrs. Cheveley!

MRS. C. Oh, don't be so solemn about it, or I shall be obliged to leave a card on you. In England I suppose that would hardly be considered *en règle*. Abroad, we are more civilized. Will you see me down, Sir Robert? Now that we have both the same interests at heart we shall be great friends, I hope.

(*Sails out on SIR ROBERT CHILTERN'S arm.*

LADY CHILTERN *goes to the top of the staircase and looks down at them as they descend. Her expression is troubled. After a little time she is joined by some of the guests, and passes with them into another reception-room.*)

MABEL. What a horrid woman!

LORD G. You should go to bed.

MABEL. Lord Goring!

LORD G. My father told me to go to bed an hour ago. I don't see why I shouldn't give you the same advice. I always pass on good advice. It is the only thing to do with it.

MABEL. I am not going to bed for hours. (*Goes over to the sofa.*) You can come and sit down if you like, and talk about anything in the world except golf, Mrs. Cheveley, or problem plays. (*Catches sight of something that is lying on the sofa, half hidden by the*

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cushion.) What is this? Some one has dropped a diamond brooch! (*Shows it to him.*) I wish it was mine. I wonder whose it is?

LORD G. I wonder who dropped it.

MABEL. It is a beautiful brooch.

LORD G. It is a handsome bracelet.

MABEL. It isn't a bracelet. It's a brooch.

LORD G. It can be used as a bracelet.

(Takes it from her, and, pulling out a green letter-case, puts the ornament carefully in it, and replaces the whole thing in his breast-pocket with the most perfect sang-froid.)

MABEL. What are you doing?

LORD G. I am going to make a rather strange request to you.

MABEL. (*Eagerly.*) I have been waiting for it all the evening.

LORD G. (*Is a little taken aback, but recovers himself.*) Don't mention to anybody that I have taken charge of this brooch. Should anyone write and claim it, let me know at once.

MABEL. That is a strange request.

LORD G. Well, you see, I gave this brooch to somebody once, years ago.

MABEL. You did?

LORD G. Yes.

(LADY CHILTERN enters alone. The other guests have gone.)

MABEL. Then I shall certainly say good-night.
Good-night, Gertrude!

(Exit.)

LADY C. Good-night, dear! (*To* LORD GORING.)
You saw whom Lady Markby brought here
to-night?

LORD G. Yes. It was an unpleasant surprise.
What did she come here for?

LADY C. Apparently to try and lure Robert
to uphold some fraudulent scheme in which
she is interested.

LORD G. I should fancy she came to grief if
she tried to get Robert into her toils.

LADY C. She is incapable of understanding
an upright nature like my husband's!

LORD G. Good-night, Lady Chiltern!

LADY C. Good-night!

(Enter SIR ROBERT CHILTERN.*)*

SIR R. My dear Arthur, you are not going?
Do stop a little!

LORD G. Afraid I can't, thanks. I have
promised to look in at the Hartlocks. See
you soon. Good-bye!

(Exit.)

LADY C. Robert, it is not true, is it? You
are not going to lend your support to this
Sahara speculation? You couldn't!

SIR R. (*Starting.*) Who told you I intended
to do so?

LADY C. That woman who has just gone out, Mrs. Cheveley, as she calls herself now. She seemed to taunt me with it. Robert, I know this woman. You don't. We were at school together. She was untruthful, dishonest, an evil influence on every one whose trust or friendship she could win. I hated, I despised her. She stole things, she was a thief. She was sent away for being a thief. Why do you let her influence you?

SIR R. What you tell me may be true, but it happened many years ago. It is best forgotten! Mrs. Cheveley may have changed since then. No one should be entirely judged by their past.

LADY C. (*Sadly.*) One's past is what one is. It is the only way by which people should be judged. What did she mean by boasting that she had got you to lend your support, your name, to a thing I have heard you describe as the most dishonest and fraudulent scheme there has ever been in political life?

SIR R. (*Biting his lip.*) I was mistaken in the view I took.

LADY C. But you told me yesterday that you had received the report from the Commission, and that it entirely condemned the whole thing.

SIR R. (*Walking up and down.*) I have reasons now to believe that the Commission

was prejudiced, or, at any rate, misinformed. Besides, public and private life are different things. They have different laws, and move on different lines.

LADY C. They should both represent man at his highest. I see no difference between them.

SIR R. (*Stopping.*) In the present case, on a matter of practical politics, I have changed my mind. That is all.

LADY C. All!

SIR R. (*Sternly.*) Yes!

LADY C. Are you telling me the whole truth?

SIR R. Why do you ask me such a question?

LADY C. (*After a pause.*) Why do you not answer it?

SIR R. (*Sitting down.*) Truth is a very complex thing, and politics a very complex business. There are wheels within wheels. One may be under certain obligations to people that one must pay. Sooner or later in political life one has to compromise. Every one does.

LADY C. Why are you changed?

SIR R. Circumstances alter things.

LADY C. Circumstances should never alter principles!

SIR R. But if I told you—that it was necessary, vitally necessary?

LADY C. It can never be necessary to do

what is not honourable. Why should it be? What gain would you get? Money? We have no need of that! And money that comes from a tainted source is a degradation. Power? But power is nothing in itself. It is power to do good that is fine—that, and that only. What is it, then? Tell me why you are going to do this dishonourable thing!

SIR R. I told you it was a question of rational compromise. It is no more than that.

LADY C. That is all very well for other men, for men who treat life simply as a sordid speculation; but not for you, not for you. You are different. All your life you have stood apart from others. To the world, as to myself, you have been an ideal always. Oh! be that ideal still. Men can love what is beneath them—things unworthy, stained, dishonoured. We women worship when we love; and when we lose our worship, we lose everything! Oh! don't kill my love for you, don't kill that!

SIR R. Gertrude!

LADY C. I know that there are men with horrible secrets in their lives—men who have done some shameful thing, and who in some critical moment have to pay for it, by doing some other act of shame. Is there in your life any secret dishonour

or disgrace? Tell me, tell me at once, so that——

SIR R. That what?

LADY C. (*Speaking very slowly.*) That our lives may drift apart.

SIR R. Drift apart?

LADY C. It would be better for us both.

SIR R. There is nothing in my past life that you might not know.

LADY C. I was sure of it, I was sure of it. But why did you say those dreadful things, so unlike your real self? Don't let us ever talk about the subject again. You will write, won't you, to Mrs. Cheveley, and tell her that you cannot support this scandalous scheme of hers? If you have given her any promise you must take it back, that is all!

SIR R. Must I write and tell her that?

LADY C. Surely! What else is there to do?

SIR R. I might see her personally. It would be better.

LADY C. You must never see her again. No; you must write to her at once, now, this moment, and let your letter show her that your decision is quite irrevocable!

SIR R. Write this moment!

LADY C. Yes.

SIR R. But it is so late. It's nearly one o'clock.

LADY C. She must know at once that she has been mistaken in you—that you decline to support this scheme of hers, as you hold it to be a dishonest scheme. Yes—write the word dishonest. She knows what that word means. (SIR ROBERT CHILTERN *sits down and writes a letter. His wife takes it up and reads it.*) Yes; that will do. (*Rings bell.*) And now the envelope. (*He writes the envelope slowly. Enter MASON.*) Have this letter sent at once to Claridge's Hotel. There is no answer. (*Exit MASON. LADY CHILTERN kneels down beside her husband and puts her arms around him.*) Robert, love gives one an instinct for things. I feel to-night that I have saved you from something that might have been a danger to you, from something that might have made men honour you less than they do. I don't think you realise sufficiently that you have brought into the political life of our time a nobler atmosphere, a finer attitude towards life, a freer air of purer aims and higher ideals—I know it, and for that I love you.

SIR R. Oh, love me always, love me always!

LADY C. I will love you always, because you will always be worthy of love. We needs must love the highest when we see it! (*Kisses him and rises and goes out.*)

(SIR ROBERT CHILTERN *walks up and*

down for a moment ; then sits down and buries his face in his hands. MASON enters and begins putting out the lights.

SIR ROBERT CHILTERN *looks up.*)

SIR R. Put out the lights, Mason, put out the lights !

(MASON puts out the lights. The room becomes almost dark.

ACT DROP.

ACT II

Morning-room at SIR ROBERT CHILTERN'S house. LORD GORING, dressed in the height of fashion, is lounging in an arm-chair. SIR ROBERT CHILTERN is standing in front of the fire-place. He is evidently in a state of great mental excitement and distress. As the scene progresses he paces nervously up and down the room.

LORD G. My dear Robert, it's a very awkward business, very awkward indeed. You should have told your wife the whole thing. No man should have a secret from his wife. She invariably finds it out.

SIR R. I couldn't tell my wife. It would have made a life-long separation between us, and I should have lost the love of the one woman in the world I worship. She would have turned from me in horror . . . in horror and in contempt.

LORD G. Is Lady Chiltern as perfect as all that?

SIR R. Yes; my wife is as perfect as all that.

LORD G. (*Getting up from his chair.*) What a pity! I beg your pardon, my dear fellow, I didn't quite mean that. But if what you tell me is true, I should like to have a serious talk about life with Lady Chiltern.

SIR R. It would be quite useless.

LORD G. May I try?

SIR R. Yes; but nothing could make her alter her views.

LORD G. Well, I am bound to say that I think you should have told her years ago.

SIR R. When? When we were engaged? Do you think she would have married me if she had known that I had done a thing that I suppose most men would call shameful and dishonourable?

LORD G. (*Slowly.*) Yes; most men would call it ugly names. There is no doubt of that.

SIR R. (*Bitterly.*) Men who every day do something of the same kind themselves—Men who, each one of them, have worse secrets in their own lives.

LORD G. That is the reason they are so pleased to find out other people's secrets. It distracts public attention from their own.

SIR R. And, after all, whom did I wrong by what I did? No one.

LORD G. (*Looking at him steadily.*) Except yourself.

SIR R. (*After a pause.*) Of course I had private information about a certain transaction contemplated by the Government of the day, and I acted on it. Private information is practically the source of every large modern fortune.

LORD G. And public scandal invariably the result.

SIR R. (*Pacing up and down the room.*) Do you think that what I did nearly eighteen years ago should be brought up against me now? I was twenty-two at the time. Is it fair that the folly, the sin of one's youth, should wreck a life like mine, should shatter all that I have worked for, all that I have built up? Is it fair, Arthur?

LORD G. Life is never fair. And perhaps it is a good thing for most of us that it is not.

SIR R. Every man of ambition has to fight his century with its own weapons. To succeed one must have wealth. At all costs one must have wealth.

LORD G. You underrate yourself. Believe me, without wealth you could have succeeded just as well.

SIR R. When I was old, perhaps. When I had lost my passion for power, or could not

use it. I wanted my success when I was young. I couldn't wait.

LORD G. Well, you certainly have had your success while you are still young.

SIR R. And if it is all taken away from me now? If I lose everything over a horrible scandal? If I am hounded from public life?

LORD G. How could you have sold yourself for money?

SIR R. (*Excitedly.*) I did not sell myself for money. I bought success at a great price. That is all.

LORD G. (*Gravely.*) Yes; you certainly paid a great price for it. But what first made you think of doing such a thing?

SIR R. Baron Arnheim.

LORD G. Damned scoundrel!

SIR R. No; he was a man of most subtle and refined intellect. A man of culture, charm, and distinction. One of the most intellectual men I ever met.

LORD G. Ah! I prefer a gentlemanly fool any day. Personally I have a great admiration for stupidity. It is a sort of fellow-feeling, I suppose. But how did he do it? Tell me the whole thing.

SIR R. (*Throws himself into an arm-chair by the writing-table.*) One night after dinner at Lord Radley's the Baron began talking about success in modern life as something that

one could reduce to an absolutely definite science. With that wonderfully fascinating quiet voice of his he expounded to us the most terrible of all philosophies, the philosophy of power, preached to us the most marvellous of all gospels, the gospel of gold. I think he saw the effect he had produced on me, for some days afterwards he wrote and asked me to come and see him. He was living then in Park Lane. I remember so well how, with a strange smile on his pale, curved lips, he led me through his wonderful picture gallery, showed me his tapestries, his enamels, his jewels, his carved ivories, made me wonder at the luxury in which he lived; and then told me that luxury was nothing but a background, a painted scene in a play, and that power, power over other men, power over the world, was the one thing worth having, the one supreme pleasure worth knowing, the one joy one never tired of, and that in our time only the rich possessed it.

LORD G. (*With great deliberation.*) A thoroughly shallow creed.

SIR R. (*Rising.*) I didn't think so then. I don't think so now. Wealth has given me enormous power. It gave me at the very outset of my life freedom, and freedom is everything. You have never been poor, and

never known what ambition is. You cannot understand what a wonderful chance the Baron gave me.

LORD G. But tell me definitely, how did the Baron finally persuade you to—well, to do what you did?

SIR R. When I was going away he said to me that if I ever could give him any private information of real value he would make me a very rich man. I was dazed at the prospect he held out to me, and my ambition and my desire for power were at that time boundless. Six weeks later certain private documents passed through my hands.

LORD G. (*Keeping his eyes steadily fixed on the carpet.*) State documents?

SIR R. Yes.

(LORD GORING *sighs, then passes his hand across his forehead and looks up.*)

LORD G. I had no idea that you, of all men in the world, could have been so weak, as to yield to such a temptation.

SIR R. Oh, I am sick of hearing that phrase. Do you really think, that it is weakness that yields to temptation? I tell you that there are terrible temptations that it requires strength, strength and courage, to yield to. To stake all one's life on a single moment, to risk everything on one throw, there is no weakness in that. There is a horrible, a

terrible courage. I had that courage. I sat down the same afternoon and wrote Baron Arnheim the letter this woman now holds. He made three-quarters of a million over the transaction.

LORD G. And you?

SIR R. I received from the Baron £100,000.

LORD G. You were worth more.

SIR R. No; that money gave me exactly what I wanted, power over others. I went into the House immediately. The Baron advised me in finance from time to time. Before five years I had almost trebled my fortune. Since then everything that I have touched has turned out a success. In all things connected with money I have had a luck so extraordinary that sometimes it has made me almost afraid. I remember having read somewhere, in some strange book, that when the gods wish to punish us they answer our prayers.

LORD G. But tell me, did you never suffer any regret for what you had done?

SIR R. No. I felt that I had fought the century with its own weapons, and won.

LORD G. (*Sadly.*) You thought you had won.

SIR R. I thought so. (*After a long pause.*) Do you despise me for what I have told you?

LORD G. (*With deep feeling in his voice.*) I am very sorry for you, very sorry indeed.

SIR R. I don't say that I suffered any remorse. I didn't. Not remorse in the ordinary, rather silly sense of the word. But I have paid conscience money many times. I had a wild hope that I might disarm destiny. The sum Baron Arnheim gave me I have distributed twice over in public charities since then.

LORD G. (*Looking up.*) What a lot of harm you must have done!

SIR R. Oh, don't say that!

LORD G. Never mind what I say! I am always saying what I shouldn't say. As regards this dreadful business, I will help you in whatever way I can. Of course you know that.

SIR R. Thank you, thank you. But what is to be done? What can be done?

LORD G. (*Leaning back with his hands in his pockets.*) Well, the English can't stand a man who is always saying he is in the right, but they are very fond of a man who admits that he has been in the wrong. It is one of the best things in them. However, in your case, a confession would not do. The money, if you will allow me to say so is . . . awkward. Besides, if you did make a clean breast of the whole affair, you would never be able to talk morality again. And in England a man who can't talk morality twice a week to a large, popular, immoral

audience is quite over as a serious politician. A confession would be of no use. It would ruin you.

SIR R. The only thing for me to do now is to fight the thing out.

LORD G. (*Rising from his chair.*) I was waiting for you to say that. It is the only thing to do now. And you must begin by telling your wife the whole story.

SIR R. That I will not do. It would kill her love for me. And now about this woman, this Mrs. Cheveley. How can I defend myself against her? You knew her before, Arthur, apparently.

LORD G. Yes.

SIR R. Did you know her well?

LORD G. (*Arranging his necktie.*) So little that I got engaged to be married to her once, when I was staying at the Tenbys. The affair lasted for three days . . . nearly.

SIR R. Why was it broken off?

LORD G. (*Airily.*) Oh, I forget. By the way, have you tried her with money? She used to be confoundedly fond of money.

SIR R. I offered her any sum she wanted. She refused.

LORD G. Then the marvellous gospel of gold breaks down sometimes. The rich can't do everything, after all.

SIR R. I suppose you are right. I feel that

public disgrace is in store for me. I feel certain of it. I never knew what terror was before. I know it now.

LORD G. (*Striking the table.*) You must fight her. You must fight her.

SIR R. But how?

LORD G. Everyone has some weak point. There is some flaw in each one of us. (*Strolls over to the fireplace and looks at himself in the glass.*) My father tells me that even I have faults.

SIR R. In defending myself against Mrs. Cheveley, I have a right to use any weapon I can find, have I not?

LORD G. (*Still looking in the glass.*) She is thoroughly well able to take care of herself.

SIR R. (*Sits down at the table and takes a pen in his hand.*) Well, I shall send a cipher telegram to the Embassy at Vienna, to inquire if there is anything known against her. There may be some secret scandal she might be afraid of.

LORD G. (*Settling his buttonhole.*) Oh, I should fancy Mrs. Cheveley is one of those very modern women of our time who find a new scandal as becoming as a new hat. I am sure she adores scandals, and that the sorrow of her life at present is that she can't manage to have enough of them.

SIR R. (*Writing.*) Why do you say that?

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LORD G. (*Turning round.*) Well, she wore far too much rouge last night, and not quite enough clothes. That is always a sign of despair in a woman.

SIR R. (*Ringing a bell.*) But it is worth while my wiring to Vienna, is it not?

LORD G. It is always worth while asking a question, though it is not always worth while answering one.

(*Enter MASON.*)

SIR R. Is Mr. Trafford in his room?

MASON. Yes, Sir Robert.

SIR R. (*Puts what he has written into an envelope, which he then carefully closes.*) Tell him to have this sent off in cipher at once. There must not be a moment's delay. (*MASON then goes out with the letter.*) She must have had some curious hold over Baron Arnheim. I wonder what it was.

LORD G. (*Smiling.*) I wonder.

SIR R. I will fight her to the death, as long as my wife knows nothing.

LORD G. (*Strongly.*) Oh, fight in any case—in any case.

SIR R. (*With a gesture of despair.*) If my wife found out, there would be little left to fight for. It is a chance, just a chance, but I believe in it. And as I fought the age

with its own weapons, I will fight her with her weapons.

LORD G. I should not fancy Mrs. Cheveley is a woman who would be easily frightened.

SIR R. I clutch at every chance.

(Enter LADY CHILTERN in walking dress.)

LADY C. Good afternoon, Lord Goring!

LORD G. Good afternoon, Lady Chiltern! Have you been in the Park?

LADY C. No; I have just come from the Women's Liberal Association: I have come in to have my tea. *(To LORD G.)* You will wait and have some tea, won't you?

LORD G. I'll wait for a short time, thanks.

LADY C. I will be back in a moment. I am only going to take my hat off.

LORD G. *(In his most earnest manner.)* Oh! please don't. It is so pretty. One of the prettiest hats I ever saw. I hope the Women's Liberal Association received it with loud applause.

LADY C. *(With a smile.)* We have much more important work to do than look at each other's hats, Lord Goring.

LORD G. Really? What sort of work?

LADY C. Oh! dull, useful, delightful things. Everything, in fact, that you would find thoroughly uninteresting.

LORD G. And never hats?

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LADY C. (*With mock indignation.*) Never hats, never !

(LADY CHILTERN goes out through the door leading to her boudoir.)

SIR R. (*Takes LORD GORING'S hand.*) You have been a good friend to me, Arthur, a thoroughly good friend. You have enabled me to tell you the truth. That is something. The truth has always stifled me.

LORD G. Ah ! the truth is a thing I get rid of as soon as possible !

SIR R. I would to God that I had been able to tell the truth . . . to live the truth. Ah ! that is the great thing in life, to live the truth. (*Sighs, and goes towards the door.*) I'll see you soon again, shan't I ?

LORD G. Certainly. Whenever you like. I'll come round to-morrow morning. If you should want me to-night by any chance, you ring me up at Curzon Street.

SIR R. Thank you.

(*As he reaches the door, LADY CHILTERN enters from her boudoir.*)

LADY C. You are not going, Robert ?

SIR R. I have some letters to write, dear.

LADY C. (*Going to him.*) You work too hard. You seem never to think of yourself, and you are looking so tired.

SIR R. It is nothing, dear, nothing.

(*He kisses her and goes out.*)

LADY C. (*To LORD GORING.*) Do sit down. I am so glad you have called. I want to talk to you about . . . well, not about hats, or the Women's Liberal Association. You take far too much interest in the first subject, and not nearly enough in the second.

LORD G. You want to talk to me about Mrs. Cheveley?

LADY C. Yes. You have guessed it. After you left last night I found out that what she had said was really true. Of course I made Robert write her a letter at once, withdrawing his promise.

LORD G. So he gave me to understand.

LADY C. To have kept it would have been the first stain on a career that has been stainless always. Robert must be above reproach. He is not like other men. He cannot afford to do what other men do. (*She looks at LORD GORING, who remains silent.*) Don't you agree with me? You are Robert's greatest friend. You are our greatest friend. No one, except myself, knows Robert better than you do. He has no secrets from me, and I don't think he has any from you.

LORD G. I don't think so.

LADY C. Then am I not right in my estimate of him? I know I am right. But speak to me frankly.

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LORD G. (*Looking straight at her.*) Quite frankly?

LADY C. Surely. You have nothing to conceal, have you?

LORD G. Nothing. But, my dear Lady Chiltern, I think, if you will allow me to say so, that in practical life——

LADY C. (*Smiling.*) Of which you know so little, Lord Goring——

LORD G. Of which I know nothing by experience, though I know something by observation. I think that in practical life there is something about success, actual success, that is a little unscrupulous, something about ambition that is unscrupulous always. Once a man has set his heart and soul on getting to a certain point, if he has to climb the crag, he climbs the crag; if he has to walk in the mire——

LADY C. Well?

LORD G. He walks in the mire. Of course I am only talking generally about life.

LADY C. (*Gravely.*) I hope so. Why do you look at me so strangely?

LORD G. Lady Chiltern, I have sometimes thought that . . . perhaps you are a little hard in some of your views on life. I think that . . . often you don't make sufficient allowances. Supposing, for instance, that—that any public man, my father, or Robert,

say, had, years ago, written some foolish letter to someone.

LADY C. What do you mean by a foolish letter?

LORD G. A letter gravely compromising one's position. I am only putting an imaginary case.

LADY C. Robert is as incapable of doing a foolish thing as he is of doing a wrong thing.

LORD G. (*After a long pause.*) Nobody is incapable of doing a foolish thing. Nobody is incapable of doing a wrong thing. All I know is that life cannot be understood without much charity, cannot be lived without much charity. It is love, and not German philosophy, that is the true explanation of this world. And if you are ever in trouble, trust me absolutely, and I will help you in every way I can. If you ever want me, come to me for my assistance, and you shall have it. Come at once to me.

LADY C. (*Looking at him in surprise.*) You are talking quite seriously. I don't think I ever heard you talk seriously before.

LORD G. (*Laughing.*) You must excuse me, Lady Chiltern. It won't occur again, if I can help it.

LADY C. But I like you to be serious.

(*Enter MABEL CHILTERN, in the most ravishing frock.*)

MABEL. Dear Gertrude, don't say such a

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dreadful thing to Lord Goring. Seriousness would be very unbecoming to him. Good afternoon, Lord Goring!

LORD G. I have to be going now.

MABEL. Just when I have come in! What dreadful manners you have! Will you ride to-morrow morning?

LORD G. Yes, at ten.

MABEL. Don't forget.

LORD G. By the way, Lady Chiltern, there is no list of your guests in *The Morning Post* to-day. Could you let me have one? I have a particular reason for asking you.

LADY C. I am sure Mr. Trafford will be able to give you one.

LORD G. Thanks, so much.

MABEL. Tommy is the most useful person in London.

LORD G. (*Turning to her.*) And who is the most ornamental?

MABEL. (*Triumphantly.*) I am.

LORD G. How clever of you to guess it! Good-bye, Lady Chiltern! You will remember what I said to you, won't you?

LADY C. Yes; but I don't know why you said it to me.

LORD G. I hardly know myself. Good-bye, Miss Mabel! Ten to-morrow.

MABEL. Sharp.

LORD G. Quite sharp. But don't bring Mr. Trafford.

MABEL. (*With a little toss of the head.*) Of course I shan't bring Tommy Trafford. Tommy Trafford is in great disgrace.

LORD G. I am delighted to hear it. (*Bows and goes out.*)

MABEL. Gertrude, I wish you would speak to Tommy Trafford.

LADY C. What has poor Mr. Trafford done this time? Robert says he is the best secretary he has ever had.

MABEL. Well, Tommy has proposed to me again. Tommy really does nothing but propose to me. He proposed to me last night: he proposed to me in broad daylight this morning, in front of that dreadful statue of Achilles. Then at luncheon I saw by the glare in his eye that he was going to propose again, and I just managed to check him. He is so annoying in the way he proposes! If he proposed at the top of his voice, I should not mind so much. That might produce some effect on the public. But he does it in a horrid confidential way; in fact his methods of proposing are quite out of date. I wish, Gertrude, you would speak to him, and tell him that once a week is quite often enough to propose to anyone.

LADY C. Robert thinks very highly of Mr.

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Trafford. He believes he has a brilliant future before him.

MABEL. Oh! I wouldn't marry a man with a future before him for anything under the sun.

LADY C. Mabel!

MABEL. I know, dear. You married a man with a future, didn't you? But then Robert was a genius. You can stand geniuses. As a rule, I think they are quite impossible. They are always thinking about themselves, when I want them to be thinking about me. I must go round now and rehearse at Lady Basildon's. You remember, we are having tableaux, don't you? (*Kisses LADY CHILDREN, and goes out; then comes running back.*) Oh, Gertrude, do you know who is coming to see you? That dreadful Mrs. Cheveley, in a most lovely gown. Did you ask her?

LADY C. (*Rising.*) Mrs. Cheveley! Coming to see me? Impossible!

MABEL. I assure you she is coming upstairs, as large as life and not nearly so natural.

LADY C. You need not wait, Mabel. Remember, Lady Basildon is expecting you.

MABEL. Oh! I must shake hands with Lady Markby. She is delightful. I love being scolded by her.

(*Enter MASON.*)

MASON. Lady Markby. Mrs. Cheveley.

(*Enter LADY MARKBY and MRS. CHEVELEY.*)

LADY C. (*Advancing to meet them.*) Dear Lady Markby, how nice of you to come and see me! (*Shakes hands with her and bows somewhat distantly to MRS. CHEVELEY.*) Won't you sit down, Mrs. Cheveley?

MRS. C. Thanks. Isn't that Miss Chiltern? I should like so much to know her.

LADY C. Mabel, Mrs. Cheveley wishes to know you.

(*MABEL CHILTERN gives a little nod.*)

MRS. C. (*Sitting down.*) I thought your gown so charming last night, Miss Chiltern. So simple and . . . suitable.

MABEL. Really? I must tell my dress-maker. It will be such a surprise to her. Good-bye, Lady Markby!

LADY M. Going already?

MABEL. I am so sorry, but I am obliged to. I am just off to rehearsal. I have got to stand on my head in some tableaux.

LADY M. On your head, child! Oh! I hope not. I believe it is most unhealthy. (*Takes a seat on the sofa next LADY CHILTERN.*)

MABEL. But it is for an excellent charity. I am the secretary, and Tommy Trafford is treasurer.

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MRS. C. And what is Lord Goring ?

MABEL. Oh ! Lord Goring is president.

MRS. C. The post should suit him admirably, unless he has deteriorated since I knew him first.

LADY M. (*Reflecting.*) You are remarkably modern. Nothing is so dangerous as being too modern. One is apt to grow old-fashioned quite suddenly. I have known many instances of it.

MABEL. What a dreadful prospect.

LADY M. Ah ! my dear, you need not be nervous. You will always be as pretty as possible. That is the best fashion there is, and the only fashion that England succeeds in setting.

MABEL. (*With a curtsey.*) Thank you so much, Lady Markby, for England . . . and myself. (*Goes out.*)

LADY M. (*Turning to LADY CHILTERN.*) Dear Gertrude, we just called to know if Mrs. Cheveley's diamond brooch has been found.

LADY C. Here ?

MRS. C. Yes. I missed it when I got back to Claridge's, and I thought I might possibly have dropped it here.

LADY C. I have heard nothing about it. But I will send for the butler and ask. (*Touches the bell.*)

MRS. C. Oh, pray don't trouble, Lady Chil-

tern. I dare say I lost it at the theatre, before we came on here.

LADY M. Ah yes, I suppose it must have been at the theatre. The fact is, we all scramble and jostle so much these days that I wonder we have anything at all left on us at the end of an evening. I know myself that, when I am coming back from the Court, I always feel as if I hadn't a shred on me, except a small shred of decent reputation, just enough to prevent the lower classes making painful observations through the windows of the carriage.

MRS. C. It is nearly six years since I have been in London for the Season, and I must say Society has become dreadfully mixed. One sees the oddest people everywhere.

LADY M. That is quite true, dear. But one needn't know them. I'm sure I don't know half the people who come to my house. Indeed, from all I hear, I shouldn't like to.

(Enter MASON.)

LADY C. What sort of a brooch was it that you lost, Mrs. Cheveley?

MRS. C. A diamond snake-brooch with a ruby, a rather large ruby.

LADY M. I thought you said there was a sapphire on the head, dear?

MRS. C. *(Smiling.)* No, Lady Markby—a ruby.

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LADY M. (*Nodding her head.*) And very becoming, I am quite sure.

LADY C. Was a ruby and diamond brooch found in any of the rooms this morning, Mason?

MASON. No, my lady.

MRS. C. It really is of no consequence, Lady Chiltern. I am so sorry to have put you to any inconvenience.

LADY C. (*Coldly.*) Oh, it has been no inconvenience. You can bring tea.

(*Exit MASON.*)

LADY M. Well, I must say it is most annoying to lose anything. I remember once at Bath, years ago, losing in the Pump Room an exceedingly handsome cameo bracelet that Sir John had given me. I don't think he has ever given me anything since, I am sorry to say. Really, this horrid House of Commons quite ruins our husbands for us. I think the Lower House by far the greatest blow to a happy married life that there has been since that terrible thing called Eugenics was invented.

LADY C. Ah! it is heresy to say that in this house, Lady Markby. Robert is a great champion of Eugenics and so, I am afraid, am I.

LADY M. Well, dear Gertrude, you belong to

the younger generation, and I am sure it is all right if you approve of it. In my time, of course, we were taught not to understand anything. That was the old system, and wonderfully interesting it was. I assure you that the number of things I and my poor dear sister were taught not to understand was quite extraordinary. But modern women understand everything, I am told.

MRS. C. Except their husbands. That is the one thing the modern woman never understands.

LADY M. And a very good thing too, dear, I dare say. It might break up many a happy home if they did. Not yours, I need hardly say, Gertrude. You have married a pattern husband. I wish I could say as much for myself. But since Sir John has taken to attending the debates regularly, which he never used to do in the good old days, his language has become quite impossible. He always seems to think that he is addressing the House, and consequently whenever he discusses the state of the agricultural labourer, or the Welsh Church, I am obliged to send all the servants out of the room. It is not pleasant to see one's own butler, who has been with one for twenty-three years, actually blushing at the sideboard, and the footmen making contortions in corners like

persons in circuses. I trust, Gertrude, that Sir Robert is not like that?

LADY C. But I am very much interested in politics, Lady Markby. I love to hear Robert talk about them.

(The butler enters, followed by the footmen. Tea is set on a small table close to LADY CHILTERN.)

LADY C. May I give you some tea, Mrs. Cheveley?

MRS. C. Thanks.

(The butler hands MRS. CHEVELEY a cup of tea on a salver.)

LADY C. Some tea, Lady Markby?

LADY M. No thanks, dear. *(The servants go out.)* The fact is, I have promised to go round for ten minutes to see poor Lady Brancaster, who is in very great trouble. Her daughter, quite a well-brought-up girl, has actually become engaged to a curate in Shropshire. It is very sad, very sad indeed. I can't understand this mania for curates. In my time we girls saw them, of course, running about the place like rabbits. But we never took any notice of them, I need hardly say. But I am told that now country society is quite honeycombed with them. *(Turning to LADY CHILTERN.)* You know Lady Brancaster, don't you, dear?

LADY C. Just slightly. She was staying at

Langton last autumn, when we were there.

LADY M. Well, like all stout women, she looks the very picture of happiness, as no doubt you noticed. But there are many tragedies in her family, besides this affair of the curate. Her own sister, Mrs. Jekyll, had a most unhappy life; through no fault of her own, I am sorry to say. She ultimately was so broken-hearted that she went into a convent, or on to the operatic stage, I forget which. No; I think it was decorative art-needlework she took up. I know she had lost all sense of pleasure in life. (*Rising.*) And now, Gertrude, if you will allow me, I shall leave Mrs. Cheveley in your charge and call back for her in a quarter of an hour. Or perhaps, dear Mrs. Cheveley, you wouldn't mind waiting in the carriage while I am with Lady Brancaster. As I intend it to be a visit of condolence, I shan't stay long.

MRS. C. (*Rising.*) I don't mind waiting in the carriage.

LADY C. (*Rising.*) Oh, I hope Mrs. Cheveley will stay here a little.

MRS. C. How very kind of you, Lady Chiltern!

LADY M. Ah! no doubt you both have many pleasant reminiscences of your schooldays

to talk over together. Good-bye, dear Gertrude! Shall I see you at Lady Bonar's to-night?

LADY C. Robert and I are dining at home by ourselves to-night. Robert, of course, will have to be in the House to-night.

LADY M. Dining at home by yourselves? Is that quite prudent? Ah, I forgot, your husband is an exception. Mine is the general rule, and nothing ages a woman so rapidly as having married the general rule.

(Exit LADY MARKBY.)

MRS. C. Wonderful woman, Lady Markby, isn't she? Talks more and says less than anybody I ever met. She is made to be a public speaker.

(LADY CHILTERN makes no answer, but remains standing. There is a pause.

Then the eyes of the two women meet.

LADY CHILTERN looks stern and pale.

MRS. CHEVELEY seems rather amused.)

LADY C. Mrs. Cheveley, I think it is right to tell you quite frankly that, had I known who you really were, I should not have invited you to my house last night.

MRS. C. *(With an impertinent smile.)* Really?

LADY C. I could not have done so.

MRS. C. I see that after all these years you have not changed a bit, Gertrude.

LADY C. I never change.

MRS. C. (*Elevating her eyebrows.*) Then life has taught you nothing?

LADY C. It has taught me that a person who has once been guilty of a dishonest and dishonourable action may be guilty of it a second time, and should be shunned.

MRS. C. Would you apply that rule to every one?

LADY C. Yes, to every one, without exception.

MRS. C. Then I am sorry for you, Gertrude, very sorry for you.

LADY C. You see now, I am sure, that for many reasons any further acquaintance between us during your stay in London is quite impossible.

MRS. C. (*Leaning back in her chair.*) Do you know, I don't mind your talking morality a bit. Morality is simply the attitude we adopt towards people whom we personally dislike. You dislike me. I am quite aware of that. And I have always detested you. And yet I have come here to do you a service.

LADY C. (*Contemptuously.*) Like the service you wished to render my husband last night, I suppose. Thank heaven, I saved him from that.

MRS. C. (*Starting to her feet.*) It was you who made him write that insolent letter to me? It was you who made him break his promise?

LADY C. Yes.

MRS. C. Then you must make him keep it. I give you till to-morrow morning—no more. If by that time your husband does not solemnly bind himself to help me in this great scheme in which I am interested——

LADY C. This fraudulent speculation——

MRS. C. Call it what you choose. I hold your husband in the hollow of my hand, and if you are wise you will make him do what I tell him.

LADY C. (*Rising and going towards her.*) You are impertinent. What has my husband to do with you?

MRS. C. (*With a bitter laugh.*) In this world like meets with like. It is because your husband is himself fraudulent and dishonest that we pair so well together. Between you and him there are chasms. He and I are closer than friends. We are enemies linked together. The same sin binds us.

LADY C. How dare you class my husband with yourself? How dare you threaten him or me? Leave my house.

(SIR ROBERT CHILTERN *enters from behind. He hears his wife's last words, and sees to whom they are addressed. He is deadly pale.*)

MRS. C. Your house! A house bought with the price of dishonour. A house, every-

thing in which has been paid for by fraud.
(*Turns round and sees* SIR ROBERT CHILTERN.)
Ask him what the origin of his fortune is!
Get him to tell you how he sold to a stock-
broker a Cabinet secret. Learn from him
to what you owe your position.

LADY C. It is not true! Robert! It is not true!

MRS. C. (*Pointing at him with outstretched finger.*) Can he deny it? Does he dare to?

SIR R. Go! Go at once. You have done your worst now.

(SIR ROBERT CHILTERN *rings the bell.*)

MRS. C. My worst? I have not yet finished with you, with either of you. I give you both till to-morrow at noon. If by then you don't do what I tell you to do, the whole world shall know the origin of Robert Chiltern.

(*Enter MASON.*)

SIR R. Show Mrs. Cheveley out.

(MRS. CHEVELEY *starts*; then bows with somewhat exaggerated politeness to LADY CHILTERN, who makes no sign of response. As she passes by SIR ROBERT CHILTERN, who is standing close to the door, she pauses for a moment and looks him straight in the face. She then goes out followed by the servant, who closes the door after him. The husband and

wife are left alone. LADY CHILTERN stands like some one in a dreadful dream. Then she turns round and looks at her husband. She looks at him with strange eyes, as though seeing him for the first time.)

LADY C. You sold a Cabinet secret for money! You began your life with fraud! You built up your career on dishonour! Oh, tell me it is not true! Lie to me! Lie to me! Tell me it is not true!

SIR R. What this woman said is quite true. But you don't realise how I was tempted. Let me tell you the whole thing. (*Goes towards her.*)

LADY C. You sold yourself for money? Oh! a common thief were better. You put yourself up to sale to the highest bidder! You were bought in the market. You lied to the whole world. And yet you will not lie to me.

SIR R. (*Rushing towards her.*) Gertrude! Gertrude!

LADY C. (*Thrusting him back with outstretched hands.*) No, don't speak! Say nothing! Your voice wakes terrible memories—memories of things—memories of words that made me love you—memories that now are horrible to me. And how I worshipped you! You were to me something apart.

The world seemed to me finer because you were in it, and goodness more real because you lived. And now—oh, when I think that I made of a man like you my ideal, the ideal of my life!

SIR R. There was your mistake. There was your error. The error all women commit. Why can't you women love us, faults and all? Why do you place us on monstrous pedestals? We have all feet of clay, women as well as men; but when we men love women, we love them knowing their weaknesses, their follies, their imperfections, love them all the more, it may be, for that reason. It is not the perfect, but the imperfect, who have need of love. It is when we are wounded by our own hands, or by the hands of others, that love should come to cure us—else what use is love at all? All sins, except a sin against itself, love should forgive. All lives, save loveless lives, true love should pardon. A man's love is like that. It is wider, larger, more human than a woman's. Women think that they are making ideals of men. What they are making of us are false idols merely. You made your false idol of me, and I had not the courage to come down, show you my wounds, tell you my weaknesses. I was afraid that I might lose your love, as I have

lost it now. And so, last night, you ruined my life for me—yes, ruined it! What this woman asked of me was nothing compared to what she offered to me. She offered security, peace, stability. The sin of my youth, that I had thought was buried, rose up in front of me, hideous, horrible, with its hands at my throat. I could have killed it for ever, sent it back into its tomb, destroyed its record, burned the one witness against me. You prevented me. No one but you, you know it. And now what is there before me but public disgrace, ruin, terrible shame, the mockery of the world, a lonely, dishonoured life, a lonely, dishonoured death, it may be, some day? Let women make no more ideals of men! Let them not put them on altars and bow before them, or they may ruin other lives as completely as you—you whom I have so wildly loved—have ruined mine!

(He passes from the room. LADY CHILTERN rushes towards him, but the door is closed when she reaches it. Then she flings herself down beside a sofa and buries her face. Her sobs are like the sobs of a child.)

ACT DROP.

ACT III

A Sitting-room in LORD GORING'S house in Curzon Street. On the right is the door leading into the hall. On the left, the door of the smoking-room. A pair of folding doors at the back open into the drawing-room. The fire is lit. PHIPPS, the butler, is arranging some newspapers on the writing-table. The distinction of Phipps is his impassivity. He has been termed by enthusiasts the Ideal Butler. The Sphinx is not so incommunicable. He is a mask with a manner. Of his intellectual or emotional life, history knows nothing. He represents the dominance of form. LORD GORING at a mirror is fixing a flower in his evening coat.

LORD G. You see, Phipps, fashion is what one wears oneself. What is unfashionable is what other people wear.

PHIPPS. Yes, my lord.

LORD G. Just as vulgarity is simply the conduct of other people.

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PHIPPS. Yes, my lord.

LORD G. Other people are quite dreadful.
The only possible society is oneself.

PHIPPS. Yes, my lord.

LORD G. For the future a more trivial flower
on Thursday evenings.

PHIPPS. I will speak to the florist, my lord.
She has had a loss in her family lately,
which perhaps accounts for what your
lordship complains of.

LORD G. Extraordinary thing about trades-
people in England—they are always losing
their relations.

PHIPPS. Yes, my lord! They are extremely
fortunate in that respect.

(LORD GORING *turns round and looks at
him.* PHIPPS *remains impassive.*)

LORD G. Hum! Any letters, Phipps?

PHIPPS. Three, my lord.

(*Hands letters on a salver.*)

LORD G. (*Taking letters.*) Want my car
round in twenty minutes.

PHIPPS. Yes, my lord.

(*Goes towards door.*)

LORD G. (*Holds up letter in pink envelope.*)

Ahem! Phipps, when did this letter arrive?

PHIPPS. It was brought by hand just after
your lordship went to the club.

LORD G. That will do. (*Exit PHIPPS.*) Lady
Chiltern's handwriting on Lady Chiltern's

pink notepaper. Wonder what Lady Chiltern has got to say to me? (*Sits at bureau and opens letter, and reads it.*) "I want you. I trust you. I am coming to you.—Gertrude." [*Bell rings.*] (*Puts down the letter with a puzzled look. Then takes it up, and reads it again slowly.*) So she has found out everything! (*Pulls out watch and looks at it.*)

(*Enter PHIPPS.*)

PHIPPS. Lord Caversham.

(*Enter LORD CAVERSHAM.*)

LORD G. Delighted to see you, my dear father.

(*Goes to meet him.*)

LORD C. Take my cloak off.

LORD G. Is it worth while?

LORD C. Of course it is worth while, sir.
Which is the most comfortable chair?

LORD G. This one. It is the chair I use myself, when I have visitors.

LORD C. Thank ye. No draught, I hope, in this room?

LORD G. No, father.

LORD C. (*Sitting down.*) Glad to hear it.
Can't stand draughts. No draughts at home.

LORD G. Good many breezes.

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LORD C. Eh? Eh? Don't understand what you mean. Want to have a serious conversation with you, sir.

LORD G. My dear father! At this hour?

LORD C. Well, sir, it is only ten o'clock. What is your objection to the hour? I think the hour is an admirable hour.

LORD G. Well, the fact is, this is not my day for talking seriously. I am very sorry, but it is not my day.

LORD C. What do you mean, sir?

LORD G. During the Season, I talk seriously only on the first Tuesday in every month, from four to seven.

LORD C. Well, make it Tuesday, sir, make it Tuesday.

LORD G. But it is after seven, and my doctor says I must not have any serious conversation after seven. It makes me talk in my sleep.

LORD C. Talk in your sleep? What does that matter? You are not married.

LORD G. No, I am not married.

LORD C. Hum! That is what I have come to talk to you about. You have got to get married, and at once. Why, when I was your age, sir, I had been an inconsolable widower for three months, and was already paying my addresses to your admir-

able mother. Damme, sir, it is your duty to get married. You can't be always living for pleasure. Every man of position is married now. Bachelors are not fashionable any more. They are a damaged lot. Too much is known about them. You must get a wife, sir. Look where your friend Robert Chiltern has got to by probity, hard work, and a sensible marriage with a good woman. Why don't you imitate him? Why don't you take him for your model?

LORD G. I think I shall.

LORD C. I wish you would. Then I should be happy. At present I make your mother's life miserable on your account. You are heartless, sir, quite heartless.

LORD G. I hope not.

LORD C. And it is high time for you to get married. You are thirty-six years of age now. And there is a draught in your room, besides, which makes your conduct worse. Why did you tell me there was no draught? I feel a draught, sir, I feel it distinctly.

LORD G. So do I. It is a dreadful draught. I will come and see you to-morrow. We can talk over anything you like. Let me help you on with your cloak.

LORD C. No, sir; I have called this evening for a definite purpose, and I am going to see

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it through at all costs to my health or yours.
Put down my cloak.

LORD G. Certainly. But let us go into another room. (*Rings bell.*) There is a dreadful draught here.

(*Enter PHIPPS.*)

Phipps, is there a good fire in the smoking-room?

PHIPPS. Yes, my lord.

LORD G. Come in there, father. Your sneezes are quite heart-rending.

LORD C. Well, I suppose I have a right to sneeze when I choose?

LORD G. (*Apologetically.*) Quite so. I was merely expressing sympathy.

LORD C. Oh, damn sympathy. There is a great deal too much of that sort of thing going on now.

LORD G. I quite agree with you. If there was less sympathy in the world there would be less trouble in the world.

LORD C. (*Going towards the smoking-room.*) That is a paradox, sir. I hate paradoxes.

LORD G. So do I, rather. Everybody one meets is a paradox, it seems to me. It is a great bore.

LORD C. (*Turning round, and looking at his son beneath his bushy eyebrows.*) Do you always really understand what you say?

LORD G. (*After some hesitation.*) Yes, if I listen attentively.

LORD C. (*Indignantly.*) Conceited young puppy!

(*Goes off grumbling into the smoking-room.*)

LORD G. Phipps, there is a lady coming to see me this evening on particular business. Show her into the drawing-room when she arrives. You understand?

PHIPPS. Yes, my lord.

LORD G. It is a matter of the gravest importance.

PHIPPS. I understand, my lord.

LORD G. No one else is to be admitted, under any circumstances.

PHIPPS. I understand, my lord.

(*Bell rings.*)

LORD G. Ah! that is probably the lady. I shall see her myself.

(*Just as he is going towards the door*

LORD CAVERSHAM *enters from the smoking-room.*)

LORD C. Well, sir? Am I to wait attendance on you?

LORD G. (*Considerably perplexed.*) In a moment, father. Do excuse me.

(*LORD CAVERSHAM goes back.*)

Well, remember my instructions, Phipps—into that room.

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PHIPPS. Yes, my lord.

(LORD GORING goes into the smoking-room. HAROLD the footman shows MRS. CHEVELEY in. *Lamia-like, she is in green and silver. She has a cloak of black satin, lined with dead rose-leaf silk.*)

HAROLD. What name, madam?

MRS. C. (*To PHIPPS, who advances towards her.*) Is Lord Goring not here? I was told he was at home.

PHIPPS. His lordship is engaged at present with Lord Caversham, madam.

(*Turns a cold glassy eye on HAROLD, who at once retires.*)

MRS. C. (*To herself.*) How very filial!

PHIPPS. His lordship told me to ask you, madam, to be kind enough to wait in the drawing-room for him. His lordship will come to you there.

MRS. C. (*With a look of surprise.*) Lord Goring expects me?

PHIPPS. Yes, madam.

MRS. C. Are you quite sure?

PHIPPS. His lordship told me that if a lady called I was to ask her to wait in the drawing room. (*Goes to the door of the drawing-room, opens it, and turns up electric lights.*) His lordship's directions on the subject were very precise.

MRS. C. How thoughtful of him ! To expect the unexpected shows a thoroughly modern intellect. (*Goes towards the room and looks in.*) Ugh ! How dreary a bachelor's room always looks. I shall have to alter all this. (*PHIPPS switches on more lights in the drawing-room.*) No, I don't care for this light. It is far too glaring. Light some candles.

PHIPPS. Certainly, madam.

MRS. C. I hope the candles have very becoming shades.

PHIPPS. We have had no complaints about them, madam, as yet.

(*Passes into the drawing-room and switches on side-lights instead. MRS. CHEVELEY inspects papers on table.*)

MRS. C. (*Takes up letter.*) "I trust you. I want you. I am coming to you.—Gertrude."
"I trust you. I want you. I am coming to you."

(*A look of triumph comes over her face. She is just about to steal the letter when PHIPPS comes in.*)

PHIPPS. The candles in the drawing-room are lit, madam, as you directed.

MRS. C. Thank you.

(*Rises hastily and slips the letter under a large silver-cased blotting-book that is lying on the table.*)

PHIPPS. I trust the shades will be to your

liking, madam. They are the most becoming we have.

MRS. C. (*With a smile.*) Then I am sure they will be perfectly right.

PHIPPS. (*Gravely.*) Thank you, madam.

(MRS. CHEVELEY goes into the drawing-room. PHIPPS closes the door and retires. The door is then slowly opened, and MRS. CHEVELEY comes out and creeps stealthily towards the writing-table. Suddenly voices are heard from the smoking-room. MRS. CHEVELEY looks nervous, and stops. The voices grow louder, and she goes back into the drawing-room, biting her lip.)

(*Enter LORD GORING and LORD CAVERSHAM.*)

LORD G. (*Expostulating.*) My dear father, if I am to get married, surely you will allow me to choose the time, place, and person? Particularly the person.

LORD C. (*Testily.*) That is a matter for me, sir. You would probably make a very poor choice. It is I who should be consulted, not you. There is property at stake. It is not a matter for affection. Affection comes later on in married life.

LORD G. Yes. In married life affection comes only when people have thoroughly

disliked each other first, doesn't it? (*Puts on LORD CAVERSHAM'S cloak for him.*)

LORD C. Certainly, sir. I mean certainly not, sir. You are talking very foolishly to-night.

LORD G. Of course, I speak only from hearsay.

LORD C. You are very heartless, sir, very heartless.

(*Both go out. Then LORD GORING returns, looking rather put out, with SIR ROBERT CHILTERN.*)

SIR R. My dear Arthur, what a piece of good luck meeting you on the door-step!

LORD G. I gave orders that I was not at home to anyone. Even my father had a comparatively cold reception. He complained of a draught the whole time.

SIR R. Ah! you must be at home to me. You are my best friend. Perhaps by to-morrow you will be my only friend. My wife has discovered everything.

LORD G. Ah! I guessed as much!

SIR R. (*Looking at him.*) Really! How?

LORD G. (*After some hesitation.*) Oh, merely by something in the expression of your face as you came in. Who told her?

SIR R. Mrs. Cheveley herself! And the woman I love knows that I began my career with an act of low dishonesty—that I sold the secret that had been entrusted to me as

a man of honour. I thank heaven poor Lord Radley died without knowing that I betrayed him. I would to God I had died before I had been so horribly tempted or had fallen so low. (*Buries his face in his hands.*)

LORD G. (*After a pause.*) You have heard nothing from Vienna yet, in answer to your wire?

SIR R. (*Looking up.*) Yes; I got a telegram from the first secretary at eight o'clock to-night.

LORD G. Well?

SIR R. Nothing is absolutely known against her. On the contrary, she occupies a rather high position in society. It is a sort of open secret that Baron Arnheim left her the greater portion of his immense fortune. Beyond that I can learn nothing. Arthur, I am parched with thirst. May I ring for something? Some hock and seltzer?

LORD G. Certainly. Let me. (*Rings the bell.*)

SIR R. Thanks! I don't know what to do. I can trust you absolutely, can't I?

(*Enter PHIPPS.*)

LORD G. My dear Robert, of course. Oh!
(*to PHIPPS.*) Bring some hock and seltzer.

PHIPPS. Yes, my lord.

LORD G. And Phipps!

PHIPPS. Yes, my lord.

LORD G. Will you excuse me for a moment, Robert? I want to give some directions to my servant.

SIR R. Certainly.

LORD G. When that lady calls, tell her that I am not expected home this evening.

PHIPPS. The lady is in that room, my lord. You told me to show her into that room, my lord.

LORD G. You did perfectly right.

(Exit PHIPPS.)

SIR R. Arthur, tell me what I should do. My life seems to have crumbled about me.

LORD G. Robert, you love your wife, don't you?

SIR R. I love her more than anything in the world. I used to think ambition the great thing. It is not. Love is the great thing in the world. There is nothing but love, and I love her. There is a wide gulf between us now. She has found me out, she has found me out.

LORD G. Has she never in her life done some folly—some indiscretion—that she should not forgive you?

SIR R. My wife? Never! She does not know what weakness or temptation is. I am of clay like other men. She stands apart as

good women do—pitiless in her perfection—cold and stern and without mercy. But I love her. We are childless, and I have no one else to love, no one else to love me. Perhaps if God had sent us children she might have been kinder to me. But God has given us a lonely house. I was brutal to her this evening. But I suppose when sinners talk to saints they are brutal always. I said to her things that were hideously true, on my side, from my standpoint, from the standpoint of men. But don't let us talk of that.

LORD G. Your wife will forgive you. Perhaps at this moment she is forgiving you. She loves you, why should she not forgive?

SIR R. God grant it! God grant it! (*Buries his face in his hands.*) But there is something more I have to tell you.

(*Enter PHIPPS with drinks.*)

PHIPPS. (*Hands hock and seltzer to SIR ROBERT CHILTERN.*) Hock and seltzer, sir?

SIR R. Thank you.

LORD G. Is your motor here?

SIR R. No; I walked from the club.

LORD G. Sir Robert will take my motor, Phipps.

PHIPPS. Yes, my lord.

(*Exit.*)

LORD G. Robert, you don't mind my sending you away ?

SIR R. You must let me stay for five minutes. I have made up my mind what I am going to do in the House. The debate on the Sahara scheme comes on to-night. (*A chair falls in the next room.*) What is that ?

LORD G. Nothing.

SIR R. I heard a chair fall in the next room. Some one has been listening.

LORD G. No, no ; there is no one there.

SIR R. There is some one. There are lights in the room, and the door is ajar. Some one has been listening to every secret of my life. What does this mean ?

LORD G. You are excited, unnerved.

SIR R. Do you give me your word that there is no one there ?

LORD G. Yes.

SIR R. Your word of honour ? (*Sits down.*)

LORD G. Yes.

SIR R. (*Rises.*) Let me see for myself.

LORD G. No, no.

SIR R. If there is no one there why shouldn't I look in that room ? You don't realise what I am going through.

LORD G. I have told you that there is no one in that room—that is enough.

SIR R. (*Rushes to the door of the room.*) It is not enough. I insist on going into this room.

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LORD G. For God's sake don't! There is some one there. Some one whom you must not see.

SIR R. My life is at stake. I will know who it is.

(Enters room.)

(SIR ROBERT CHILTERN comes back with a look of scorn and anger on his face.)

SIR R. What explanation have you to give me for the presence of that woman here?

LORD G. It was for your sake she came here. It was to try and save you she came here.

SIR R. You are mad. What have I to do with her intrigues with you? Let her remain your mistress!

LORD G. It is not true. In her presence and in yours I will explain all.

SIR R. You have lied enough upon your word of honour.

(SIR ROBERT CHILTERN goes out. LORD GORING rushes to the door of the drawing-room, when MRS. CHEVELEY comes out, looking radiant and much amused.)

MRS. C. *(With a mock curtsy.)* Good evening, Lord Goring!

LORD G. Mrs. Cheveley! . . . What are you doing in my room?

MRS. C. Merely listening. I have a perfect passion for listening through keyholes. One

always hears such wonderful things through them.

LORD G. Doesn't that sound rather like tempting Providence?

MRS. C. Oh! surely Providence can resist temptation by this time.

(Makes a sign to him to take her cloak off, which he does.)

LORD G. I am glad you have called. I am going to give you some good advice.

MRS. C. Oh! pray don't.

LORD G. You have come here to sell me Robert Chiltern's letter, haven't you?

MRS. C. To offer it to you on conditions. How did you guess that?

LORD G. Because you haven't mentioned the subject. Have you got it with you?

MRS. C. *(Sitting down.)* Oh, no! A well-made dress has no pockets.

LORD G. What is your price for it?

MRS. C. How absurdly English you are! The English think that a cheque book can solve every problem in life. Money is not what I want.

LORD G. What do you want then, Mrs. Cheveley?

MRS. C. Why don't you call me Laura?

LORD G. I don't like the name.

MRS. C. You used to adore it.

LORD G. Yes: that's why.

(MRS. CHEVELEY *motions to him to sit down beside her. He smiles, and does so.*)

MRS. C. Arthur, you loved me once.

LORD G. Yes.

MRS. C. And you asked me to be your wife.

LORD G. That was the natural result of my loving you.

MRS. C. And you threw me over because you saw, or said you saw, poor old Lord Mortlake trying to have a violent flirtation with me in the conservatory at Tenby.

LORD G. I am under the impression that my lawyer settled that matter with you on certain terms—dictated by yourself.

MRS. C. At that time I was poor ; you were rich.

LORD G. Quite so. That is why you pretended to love me.

MRS. C. (*Shrugging her shoulders.*) Poor old Lord Mortlake, who had only two topics of conversation, his gout and his wife ! I never could quite make out which of the two he was talking about. He used the most horrible language about them both. Well, you were silly, Arthur. I loved you.

LORD G. You have always been far too clever to know anything about love.

MRS. C. I did love you. And you loved me. You know you loved me ; and love is a very

wonderful thing. I suppose that when a man has once loved a woman, he will do anything for her, except continue to love her? (*Puts her hand on his.*)

LORD G. (*Taking his hand away quietly.*)
Yes: except that.

MRS. C. (*After a pause.*) I am tired of living abroad. I want to come back to London. I want to have a charming house here. I want to have a salon. When I saw you last night at the Chilterns', I knew you were the only person I had ever cared for. And so, on the morning of the day you marry me, I will give you Robert Chiltern's letter. I will give it to you now, if you promise to marry me.

LORD G. Now?

MRS. C. (*Smiling.*) To-morrow.

LORD G. I should make you a very bad husband.

MRS. C. I don't mind bad husbands. I have had two. They amused me immensely.

LORD G. You mean that you amused yourself immensely, don't you?

MRS. C. What do you know about my married life?

LORD G. Nothing: but I can read it like a book.

MRS. C. What book?

LORD G. (*Rising.*) The Book of Numbers.

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MRS. C. Do you think it is quite charming of you to be so rude to a woman in your own house?

LORD G. In the case of very fascinating women, sex is a challenge, not a defence.

MRS. C. I suppose that is meant for a compliment. Women are never disarmed by compliments.

LORD G. Women are never disarmed by anything, as far as I know them.

MRS. C. (*After a pause.*) Then you are going to allow your greatest friend, Robert Chiltern, to be ruined, rather than marry some one who really has considerable attractions left. I thought you would have risen to some great height of self-sacrifice. I think you should. And the rest of your life you could spend in contemplating your own perfections.

LORD G. Oh! I do that as it is. And self-sacrifice is a thing that should be put down by law. It is so demoralising to the people for whom one sacrifices oneself.

MRS. C. As if anything could demoralise Robert Chiltern! You seem to forget that I know his real character.

LORD G. What you know about him is not his real character. It was an act of folly done in his youth—dishonourable, I admit; shameful, I admit; unworthy of him, I

admit; and therefore . . . not his true character.

MRS. C. How you men stand up for each other!

LORD G. How you women war against each other!

MRS. C. (*Bitterly.*) I only war against one woman, against Gertrude Chiltern. I hate her. I hate her now more than ever.

LORD G. Because you have brought a real tragedy into her life, I suppose.

MRS. C. Well, I suppose this interview may be regarded as at an end. You admit it was romantic, don't you? For the privilege of being your wife I was ready to surrender a great price, the climax of my diplomatic career. You decline. Very well. If Sir Robert doesn't uphold my Sahara scheme, I expose him. *Voilà tout.*

LORD G. You mustn't do that. It would be vile, horrible, infamous.

MRS. C. (*Shrugging her shoulders.*) Oh! don't use big words. They mean so little. It is a commercial transaction. That is all. There is no good mixing up sentimentality in it. I offered to sell Robert Chiltern a certain thing. If he won't pay me my price, he will have to pay the world a greater price. There is no more to be said. I must go. Good-bye.

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LORD G. You seem to have forgotten that you came here to-night to talk of love ; you, to whom the thing is a book closely sealed, went this afternoon to one of the most noble women in the world to degrade her husband in her eyes, to try and kill her love for him, to put poison in her heart, bitterness in her life, to break her idol. For that there can be no forgiveness.

MRS. C. I didn't go to taunt Gertrude at all. I called with Lady Markby simply to ask whether an ornament, a jewel, that I lost somewhere last night, had been found at the Chilterns'. If you don't believe me, you can ask Lady Markby. The scene that occurred happened after Lady Markby had left, and was really forced on me by Gertrude. I called, oh!—a little out of malice if you like—but really to ask if a diamond brooch of mine had been found. That was the origin of the whole thing.

LORD G. A diamond snake-brooch with a ruby ?

MRS. C. Yes. How do you know ?

LORD G. Because it is found. In point of fact, I found it myself, and stupidly forgot to tell the butler anything about it as I was leaving. (*Goes over to the writing table and pulls out the drawer.*) This is the brooch, isn't it ? (*Holds up the brooch.*)

MRS. C. Yes. I am so glad to get it back.
It was . . . a present.

LORD G. Won't you wear it?

MRS. C. Certainly, if you pin it in. (LORD GORING *suddenly clasps it on her arm.*) Why do you put it on as a bracelet? I never knew it could be worn as a bracelet.

LORD G. Really?

MRS. C. (*Holding out her handsome arm.*) No; but it looks very well on me as a bracelet, doesn't it?

LORD G. Yes; much better than when I saw it last.

MRS. G. When did you see it last?

LORD G. (*Calmly.*) Oh, ten years ago, on Lady Berkshire, from whom you stole it.

MRS. C. (*Starting.*) What do you mean?

LORD G. I mean that you stole that ornament from my cousin, Mary Berkshire, to whom I gave it when she was married. Suspicion fell on a wretched servant, who was sent away in disgrace. I recognised it last night. I determined to say nothing about it till I had found the thief. I have found the thief now, and I have heard her own confession.

MRS. C. (*Tossing her head.*) It is not true.

LORD G. You know it is true. Why, thief is written across your face at this moment.

MRS. C. I shall deny the whole affair from beginning to end. I shall say that I have

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never seen this wretched thing, that it was never in my possession.

(MRS. CHEVELEY *tries to get the bracelet off her arm, but fails.* LORD GORING *looks on amused.* *Her thin fingers tear at the jewel to no purpose. A curse breaks from her.*)

LORD G. You can't get that bracelet off unless you know where the spring is. It is rather difficult to find.

MRS. C. You brute! You coward! (*She tries again to unclasp the bracelet, but fails.*)

LORD G. Oh! don't use big words. They mean so little.

MRS. C. (*Again tears at the bracelet in a paroxysm of rage, with inarticulate sounds. Then stops, and looks at LORD GORING.*)

What are you going to do?

LORD G. I am going to ring for my servant. He is an admirable servant. Always comes in the moment one rings for him. When he comes I shall tell him to fetch the police.

MRS. C. (*Trembling.*) The police? What for?

LORD G. To-morrow the Berkshires will prosecute you. That is what the police are for.

MRS. C. (*Is now in an agony of physical terror. Her face is distorted. Her mouth awry. A mask has fallen from her. She is, for the*

moment, dreadful to look at.) Don't do that. I will do anything you want. Anything in the world you want.

LORD G. Give me Robert Chiltern's letter.

MRS. C. Let me have time to think.

LORD G. Give me Robert Chiltern's letter.

MRS. C. I have not got it with me. I will give it to you to-morrow.

LORD G. You know you are lying. Give it to me at once. (MRS. CHEVELEY *pulls the letter out, and hands it to him. She is horribly pale.*) This is it?

MRS. C. (*In a hoarse voice.*) Yes.

LORD G. (*Takes the letter, examines it, sighs, and burns it in the fire.*) You have moments of admirable common sense. I congratulate you.

(MRS. CHEVELEY *catches sight of LADY CHILTERN'S letter, the cover of which is just showing from under the blotting-book.*)

MRS. C. Please get me a glass of water.

LORD G. Certainly.

(*Goes to the corner of the room and pours out a glass of water. While his back is turned MRS. CHEVELEY steals LADY CHILTERN'S letter. When LORD GORING returns with the glass she refuses it with a gesture.*)

MRS. C. Thank you. Will you help me on with my cloak?

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LORD G. With pleasure. (*Puts her cloak on.*)

MRS. C. Thanks. I am never going to try to harm Robert Chiltern again.

LORD G. Fortunately you have not the chance.

MRS. C. Well, if even I had the chance, I wouldn't. On the contrary, I am going to render him a great service.

LORD G. I am charmed to hear it. It is a reformation.

MRS. C. Yes, I can't bear so upright a gentleman, so honourable an English gentleman, being so shamefully deceived, and so—(*With a bitter note of triumph in her voice*) I am going to send Robert Chiltern the love-letter his wife wrote to you to-night.

LORD G. Love-letter?

MRS. C. (*Laughing.*) "I want you. I trust you. I am coming to you.—Gertrude."

(LORD GORING *rushes to the bureau and takes up the envelope, finds it empty, and turns round.*)

LORD G. Give me back that letter. I'll take it from you by force. You shall not leave my room till I have got it.

(*He rushes towards her, but* MRS. CHEVELEY *at once puts her hand on the electric bell that is on the table. The bell sounds with shrill reverberations, and* PHIPPS *enters.*)

MRS. C. (*After a pause.*) Lord Goring merely rang that you should show me out. Good-night, Lord Goring!

(*Goes out, followed by PHIPPS.*)

CURTAIN.

ACT IV

SCENE *same as in Act II. The next morning.*

LORD GORING *is standing by the fireplace with his hands in his pockets. He is looking rather bored. JAMES is tidying newspapers, &c. on table.*

LORD G. (*Pulls out his watch, inspects it.*)
Anyone at home yet? I am full of interesting information. I feel like the latest edition of something or other.

JAMES. Sir Robert is still at the Foreign Office, my lord.

LORD G. Lady Chiltern not down yet?

JAMES. Her ladyship has not yet left her room. Miss Chiltern has just come in from riding. Lord Caversham has been waiting some time in the library for Sir Robert. I told him your lordship was here.

LORD G. Really, I don't want to meet my father three days running. Would you kindly tell him I've gone?

JAMES. (*Bowing.*) I will do so, my lord.

(*Exit JAMES.*)

(LORD GORING *throws himself down into a chair, picks up a paper and begins to read it.*)

(*Enter LORD CAVERSHAM.*)

LORD C. I knew by the servant's face that you must be up here. What are you doing, sir? Wasting your time as usual, I suppose?

LORD G. (*Throws down paper and rises.*) My dear father, when one pays a visit it is for the purpose of wasting other people's time, not one's own.

LORD C. Have you been thinking over what I spoke to you about last night?

LORD G. I have been thinking about nothing else.

LORD C. Engaged to be married yet?

LORD G. (*Genially.*) Not yet: but I hope to be before lunch time.

LORD C. (*Caustically.*) You can have till dinner time if it will be of any convenience to you.

LORD G. Thanks awfully, but I think I'd sooner be engaged before lunch.

LORD C. Humph! Never know why you always talk nonsense.

LORD G. Neither do I. (*A pause.*)

LORD C. I suppose you have read *The Times* this morning?

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LORD G. (*Airily.*) *The Times*? Certainly not. I always read the *Morning Post*.

LORD C. Do you mean to say you have not read *The Times* leading article on Robert Chiltern's career?

LORD G. Good heavens! No. What does it say?

LORD C. What should it say, sir? Everything complimentary, of course. Chiltern's speech last night on this Sahara Irrigation scheme was one of the finest pieces of oratory ever delivered in the House since Canning.

LORD G. Ah! Never heard of Canning. Never wanted to. And did . . . did Chiltern uphold the scheme?

LORD C. Uphold it, sir? How little you know him! Why, he denounced it roundly, and the whole system of modern political finance. This speech is the turning-point in his career: he has been offered the vacant seat in the Cabinet. You should read this article, sir. (*Opens "The Times."*) "Sir Robert Chiltern . . . most rising of our young statesmen . . . Brilliant orator . . . Unblemished career . . . Well-known integrity of character . . . Represents what is best in English public life . . . Noble contrast to the lax morality so common among foreign politicians. He possesses what is

wanted so much in political life of to-day—high character and high principles.” They will never say that of you, sir.

LORD G. I sincerely hope not. However, I am delighted at what you tell me about Robert, thoroughly delighted. It shows he has got pluck.

LORD C. He has got more than pluck, sir: he has got genius.

LORD G. Ah! I prefer pluck. It is not so common now as genius.

LORD C. I have not come here, sir, to argue with you about genius. I have come to know why Chiltern telephoned to me that he was going to refuse the Prime Minister’s offer.

LORD G. (*Languidly.*) Oh! Has he refused? I suppose you think it very heartless of him.

LORD C. (*Briskly.*) No, sir. I think it damned foolish of him. But I won’t allow him to make a fool of himself. I believe all this comes from associating with you. Why don’t you go into Parliament, sir?

LORD G. My dear father, do I look like a Member of Parliament? You must look like one before you have a chance of being elected.

LORD C. Why don’t you try to do something useful in life? Why don’t you propose to marry that pretty Mabel Chiltern?

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LORD G. I am of a very nervous disposition, especially in the morning.

LORD C. I don't suppose there is the smallest chance of her accepting you.

LORD G. I don't know how the betting stands to-day.

LORD C. If she did accept you she would be the prettiest fool in England.

LORD G. That is just what I should like to marry.

LORD C. You don't deserve her, sir.

LORD G. My dear father, if we men married the women we deserved, we should have a very bad time of it.

(*Enter MABEL CHILTERN.*)

MABEL. Oh! . . . How do you do, Lord Caversham? Robert has just returned and wants to see you in the library. Of course you will stay to lunch?

LORD C. I shall be delighted.

LORD G. Good morning, Miss Mabel! (*With increased emphasis.*) Good morning, Miss Mabel!

MABEL. (*Taking no notice at all of LORD GORING, and addressing herself exclusively to LORD CAVERSHAM.*) Do you think you could possibly make your son behave a little better occasionally? Just as a change.

LORD C. I regret to say, Miss Chiltern, that

I have no influence at all over my son. I wish I had. If I had, I know what I should make him do.

LORD G. Good morning, Miss Mabel !

MABEL. (*Turning round with feigned surprise.*)

Oh, are you here? Of course you understand that after breaking your appointment I am never going to speak to you again.

LORD G. Oh, please don't say such a thing. You are the one person in London I really like to have to listen to me.

MABEL. Lord Goring, I never believe a single word that either you or I say to each other.

LORD C. You are quite right, my dear, quite right . . . as far as he is concerned, I mean. He is very heartless, very heartless.

MABEL. Lord Goring, I think your father's conversation much more improving than yours. I am only going to talk to Lord Caversham in the future.

LORD G. It seems to me that I am a little in the way here.

LORD C. After that, my dear, I really must bid you good morning.

MABEL. Oh ! I hope you are not going to leave me all alone with Lord Goring? Especially at such an early hour in the day.

LORD C. I am afraid Chiltern and I can't take him with us to Downing Street. It is

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not the Prime Minister's day for seeing the unemployed.

(Shakes hands with MABEL CHILTERN, takes up his hat and stick, and goes out, with a parting glare of indignation at LORD GORING. Exit LORD CAVERSHAM.)

MABEL. *(Takes up roses and begins to arrange them in a bowl on the table.)* People who don't keep their appointments in the Park are horrid.

LORD G. Detestable.

MABEL. I am glad you admit it. But I wish you wouldn't look so pleased about it.

LORD G. I can't help it. I always look pleased when I am with you. I have something very particular to say to you.

MABEL. *(Rapturously.)* Oh! is it a proposal?

LORD G. *(Somewhat taken aback.)* Well, yes, it is—I am bound to say it is.

MABEL. *(With a sigh of pleasure.)* I am so glad. That makes the second to-day.

LORD G. *(Indignantly.)* The second to-day? What conceited ass has been impertinent enough to dare to propose to you before I had proposed to you?

MABEL. Tommy Trafford, of course. It is one of Tommy's days for proposing. He always proposes on Tuesdays and Fridays during the Season.

LORD G. You didn't accept him, I hope ?

MABEL. I make it a rule never to accept Tommy. That is why he goes on proposing. Of course, as you didn't turn up this morning, I very nearly said yes. It would have been an excellent lesson both for him and for you if I had. It would have taught you both better manners.

LORD G. Tommy is a silly little ass. I love you.

MABEL. I know. And I think you might have mentioned it before ; I am sure I have given you heaps of opportunities.

LORD G. (*Taking hold of her hand.*) Can't you love me a little in return ?

MABEL. You silly Arthur ! If you knew anything about . . . anything, which you don't, you would know that I adore you. Everyone in London knows it except you. It is a public scandal the way I adore you. I have been going about for the last six months telling the whole of society that I adore you. I wonder you consent to have anything to say to me. I have no character left at all. At least, I feel so happy that I am quite sure I have no character left at all.

LORD G. (*Catches her in his arms and kisses her. Then there is a pause of bliss.*) Dear ! Do you know I was awfully afraid of being refused !

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MABEL. (*Looking up at him.*) But you have never been refused yet by anybody, have you, Arthur? I can't imagine anyone refusing you.

LORD G. (*After kissing her again.*) Of course I'm not nearly good enough for you, Mabel.

MABEL. (*Nestling close to him.*) I am so glad, darling. I was afraid you were.

LORD G. (*After some hesitation.*) And I'm . . . I'm a little over thirty.

MABEL. Dear, you look weeks younger than that.

LORD G. (*Enthusiastically.*) How sweet of you to say so! . . . And it is only fair to tell you frankly that I am fearfully extravagant. (*Kisses her.*)

MABEL. But so am I, Arthur. So we're sure to agree.

LORD G. Now I must see Lady Chiltern. I have been waiting here all the morning to see either her or Robert.

MABEL. Do you mean to say you didn't come here to propose to me?

LORD G. (*Triumphantly.*) No; that was a flash of genius.

MABEL. Your first.

LORD G. (*With determination.*) My last.

MABEL. I am delighted to hear it. Now don't stir. I'll be back in five minutes. I will go and see why Gertrude hasn't come

down yet. And don't fall into any temptations while I am away.

LORD G. Dear Mabel, while you are away there are none. It makes me horribly dependent on you.

(*Enter* LADY CHILTERN.)

LADY C. Good morning, Lord Goring!

LORD G. (*Bowing.*) Good morning!

MABEL. (*To* LADY CHILTERN.) How pale you are looking, Gertrude. Lord Goring has something to say to you. I believe it is under the seal of publicity. Not being a member of the public I am going to leave you both alone. (*To* LORD GORING.) I shall be in the conservatory under the second palm tree on the left.

LORD G. Second on the left?

MABEL. (*With a look of mock surprise.*) Yes; the usual palm tree. (*Blows a kiss to him and goes out.*)

(*Exit* MABEL CHILTERN.)

LORD G. Lady Chiltern, I have a certain amount of very good news to tell you. Mrs. Cheveley gave me up Robert's letter last night, and I burned it. Robert is safe.

LADY C. (*Sinking on the sofa.*) Safe! Thank God, thank God for that. What a good friend you are to him—to us!

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LORD G. There is only one person now that could be said to be in danger.

LADY C. Who is that?

LORD G. (*Sitting down beside her.*) Yourself.

LADY C. I! In danger? What do you mean?

LORD G. Danger is too great a word. It is a word I should not have used. But I admit I have something to tell you that may distress you, that terribly distresses me. Yesterday evening you wrote me a letter, asking me for my help. You wrote to me as one of your oldest friends, one of your husband's oldest friends. Mrs. Cheveley stole that letter from my rooms.

LADY C. Well, what use is it to her? Why should she not have it?

LORD G. (*Rising.*) Mrs. Cheveley, pretending to see a certain meaning in that letter, proposes to send it to your husband.

LADY C. But what construction could she put on it? . . . Oh! not that! not that! If I in—in trouble, and wanting your help, trusting you, propose to come to you . . . that you may advise me . . . assist me. . . . Oh! are women so horrible as that . . . ? And she proposes to send it to my husband? Tell me what happened.

LORD G. Mrs. Cheveley arrived at my rooms last night without my knowledge. I thought

that the person waiting to see me was yourself. Robert came in unexpectedly. We were talking in the sitting-room. A chair or something fell in the next room. He forced his way in, and he discovered her. We had a terrible scene. I still thought it was you. He left me in anger. At the end of everything Mrs. Cheveley got possession of your letter—she stole it, when or how, I don't know. And now I propose that we tell Robert the whole thing, at once.

LADY C. (*Looking at him with amazement that is almost terror.*) You want me to tell Robert that the woman you expected was not Mrs. Cheveley, but myself? That it was I who you thought was concealed in a room in your house at night? You want me to tell him that?

LORD G. I think it is better that he should know the exact truth.

LADY C. (*Rising.*) Oh, I couldn't, I couldn't!

LORD G. May I do it?

LADY C. No.

LORD G. (*Gravely.*) You are wrong, Lady Chiltern.

LADY C. No. The letter must be intercepted. That is all. But how can I do it? Letters arrive for him every moment of the day. His secretaries open them and hand them to him. Oh! Why don't you tell me what to do?

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LORD G. Be calm, Lady Chiltern, I implore you. Your letter was on pink paper. He could recognise your notepaper without reading it, couldn't he? By the colour?

LADY C. I suppose so.

LORD G. Is he in the house now?

LADY C. Yes.

LORD G. Then I will go and see him myself and tell him the whole thing. He will give me the letter before he has read it, I expect. (*Goes to the door and opens it.*) Oh! Robert is coming upstairs with the letter in his hand. It has reached him already.

LADY C. (*With a cry of pain.*) Oh! you have saved his life; but what have you done with mine?

(*Enter SIR ROBERT CHILTERN. He has the letter in his hand and is reading it. He comes towards his wife, not noticing LORD GORING'S presence.*)

SIR R. "I want you. I trust you. I am coming to you.—Gertrude." Oh, my love! Is this true? Do you indeed trust me, and want me? If so, it was for me to come to you, not for you to write of coming to me. This letter of yours, Gertrude, makes me feel that nothing that the world may do can hurt me now. You want me, Gertrude? (LORD GORING, *unseen by SIR ROBERT CHILTERN, makes an imploring sign to LADY*

CHILTERN *to accept the situation and SIR ROBERT'S error.*) Ah! why did you not add that you loved me?

LADY C. (*Taking his hand.*) Because I loved you.

(LORD GORING *has retired up to door of conservatory, but remains in view of audience.*)

SIR R. (*Kisses her.*) Gertrude, you don't know what I feel. Oh, I don't care what disgrace or punishment is in store for me, if I know you love me still.

LADY C. There is no disgrace in store for you, nor any public shame. Last night Mrs. Cheveley handed Lord Goring your letter to Baron Arnheim, and he has burned it.

SIR R. Are you sure of this?

LADY C. Yes; you can ask Lord Goring.

SIR R. Then I am safe! My dear Arthur, how can I thank you? I don't know how I can repay you. (*Shakes hands with him.*)

LORD G. Don't mention the subject any more, my dear fellow. Many congratulations on your brilliant speech last night and on your new Cabinet rank, by the way.

SIR R. Oh, what a wonderful thing to be safe! For two days I have been in terror. I am safe now. I wish I had seen that one sin of my youth burning! How many men there are in modern life who would like to

see their past burning to white ashes before them! Forgive me, Arthur, for all the ghastly things I said to you last night. Of course I never guessed the real explanation of Mrs. Cheveley being in your rooms. I don't know now why you objected to my knowing she was there.

LADY C. It was not Mrs. Cheveley whom Lord Goring expected last night.

SIR R. Not Mrs. Cheveley? Who was it then?

LORD G. Lady Chiltern!

LADY C. It was your own wife. Robert, yesterday afternoon Lord Goring told me that if ever I was in trouble I could come to him for help, as he was our oldest and best friend. Later on, after that terrible scene in this room, I wrote to him telling him that I trusted him, that I had need of him, that I was coming to him for help and advice. (SIR ROBERT CHILTERN *takes the letter out of his pocket.*) Yes, that letter. I didn't go to Lord Goring's after all. I felt that it is from ourselves alone that help can come. Pride made me think that. Mrs. Cheveley went. She stole my letter and sent it anonymously to you this morning, that you should think . . . Oh! Robert, I cannot tell you what she wished you to think . . .

SIR R. What! Had I fallen so low in your eyes that you thought even for a moment I could have doubted your goodness? Gertrude, Gertrude, you are to me the white image of all good, and sin can never touch you. But there is no name at the beginning of this letter. The brilliant Mrs. Cheveley does not seem to have noticed that. There should be a name.

LADY C. Let me write yours. It is you I trust and need : you and none else.

LORD G. Well, really, Lady Chiltern, I think I should have back my own letter.

LADY C. (*Smiling.*) No ; you shall have Mabel instead. (*Takes the letter and writes her husband's name on it.*)

SIR R. I am so glad I made that speech last night in the House, so glad. I made it thinking that public disgrace might be the result. But it has not been so.

LADY C. Public honour has been the result.

SIR R. Although I am safe from detection, although every proof against me is destroyed, I suppose, Gertrude . . . I suppose, I should retire from public life ? (*He looks anxiously at his wife.*)

LADY C. (*Eagerly.*) Oh, yes, Robert, you should do that. It is your duty to do that.

SIR R. It is much to surrender.

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LADY C. No ; it will be much to gain.

(SIR ROBERT CHILTERN *walks up and down the room with a troubled expression. Then comes over to his wife, and puts his hand on her shoulder.*)

SIR R. And you would be happy living somewhere alone with me, abroad perhaps, or in the country away from London, away from public life? You would have no regrets?

LADY C. Oh ! none, Robert.

SIR R. (*Sadly.*) And your ambition for me? You used to be ambitious for me.

LADY C. Oh, my ambition ! I have none now, but that we two may love each other. It was your ambition that led you astray. Let us not talk about ambition.

SIR R. You must see the letter I was sending this morning to the Prime Minister declining his offer of a seat in the Cabinet. I left Lord Caversham disapproving of it in the library. Of course, he will never know the real reason of my refusal. (*To LORD GORING.*) I should like you to see the letter, Arthur, as well, before it goes. I don't think it will require any alteration, although I am safe from a public scandal.

(*Exit* SIR ROBERT CHILTERN.)

LORD G. Decline a seat in the Cabinet, and retire from public life? Never heard such rot in the whole course of my life. I beg your pardon, Lady Chiltern. Of course you will prevent Robert from making such a . . . from talking such . . . Will you do that?

LADY C. I think my husband is right in his determination. I approve of it.

LORD G. You approve of it?

LADY C. I admire him for it. I admire him immensely for it. I have never admired him so much before. He is finer than even I thought him.

LORD G. Why are you playing Mrs. Cheveley's cards?

LADY C. (*Startled.*) I don't understand you.

LORD G. Mrs. Cheveley made an attempt to ruin your husband. Either to drive him from public life or to make him adopt a dishonourable position. From this latter tragedy you have saved him. The former you are now thrusting on him. Why should you do him the wrong Mrs. Cheveley tried to do and failed?

LADY C. Lord Goring?

LORD G. (*Pulling himself together for a great effort, and showing the philosopher that underlies the dandy.*) You wrote me a letter last

night in which you said you trusted me and wanted my help. Now is the moment when you really want my help ; now is the time when you have got to trust me, to trust in my counsel and judgment. You love Robert. Do you want to kill his love for you ? What sort of existence will he have if you rob him of the fruits of his ambition, if you take from him the splendour of a great political career, if you close the doors of public life against him, if you condemn him to sterile failure—he who was made for triumph and progress ? Women are not meant to judge us, but to forgive us when we need forgiveness. Pardon, not punishment, is their mission. Why should you scourge him with rods for a sin done in his youth, before he knew you, before he knew himself ? A man's life is of more value than a woman's. It has larger issues, wider scope, greater ambitions. A woman's life revolves in curves of emotions. It is upon lines of intellect that a man's life progresses. Don't make any terrible mistake. A woman who can keep a man's love, and love him in return, has done all the world wants of women, or should want of them.

LADY C. (*Troubled and hesitating.*) But it is my husband himself who wishes to retire

from public life. He feels it is his duty. It was he who first said so.

LORD G. Rather than lose your love, Robert would do anything, wreck his whole career, as he is on the brink of doing now. He is making for you a terrible sacrifice. Take my advice, and do not accept a sacrifice so great. If you do, you will live to repent it bitterly. We men and women are not made to accept such sacrifices from each other. We are not worthy of them. Besides, Robert has been punished enough.

LADY C. We have both been punished. I set him up too high.

LORD G. (*With deep feeling in his voice.*) Do not for that reason set him down now too low. If he has fallen from his altar, do not thrust him into the mire. Power is his passion. He would lose everything, even his power to feel love, if you make him give up a life of action, for which he was born. Your husband's life is at this moment in your hands; your husband's love is in your hands. Don't mar both for him. Don't invent another false ideal, which would make both of you unhappy, because your early ideal has been shattered. Don't starve his nature and your own by asking him to make a foolish re-

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nunciation that will do no one any good ;
though it might possibly amuse Mrs.
Cheveley.

(Exit LORD GORING.)

*(There is a pause. LADY CHILTERN
stares blankly into space. Then SIR
ROBERT CHILTERN enters.)*

SIR R. *(Sadly.)* Gertrude, here is the draft
of my letter ? Shall I read it to you ?

LADY C. Let me see it.

*(SIR ROBERT CHILTERN hands her the
letter. LADY CHILTERN reads it, and
then, with a gesture of passion, tears
it up.)*

SIR R. What are you doing ?

LADY C. A man's life is of more value than
a woman's. It has larger issues, wider scope,
greater ambitions. Our lives revolve in
curves of emotions. It is upon lines of
intellect that a man's life progresses. I
have just learned this, and much else with
it, from Lord Goring. And I will not spoil
your life for you, nor see you spoil it as a
sacrifice to me, a useless sacrifice.

SIR R. Gertrude ! Gertrude !

LADY C. You can forget. Men easily for-
get. And women forgive. That is how
women help the world. I see that now.

SIR R. (*Deeply overcome by emotion, embraces her.*) My wife! my wife! (*Taking her hand.*) Is it love you feel for me, or is it pity merely?

LADY C. (*Kisses him.*) It is love, Robert. Love and only love. For both of us a new life is beginning.

CURTAIN.

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